Galaxy®

MAGAZINE

25

AUGUST 1960

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HOW TO SLAY DRAGONS

By

WILLY LEY

MIND PARTNER

By

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

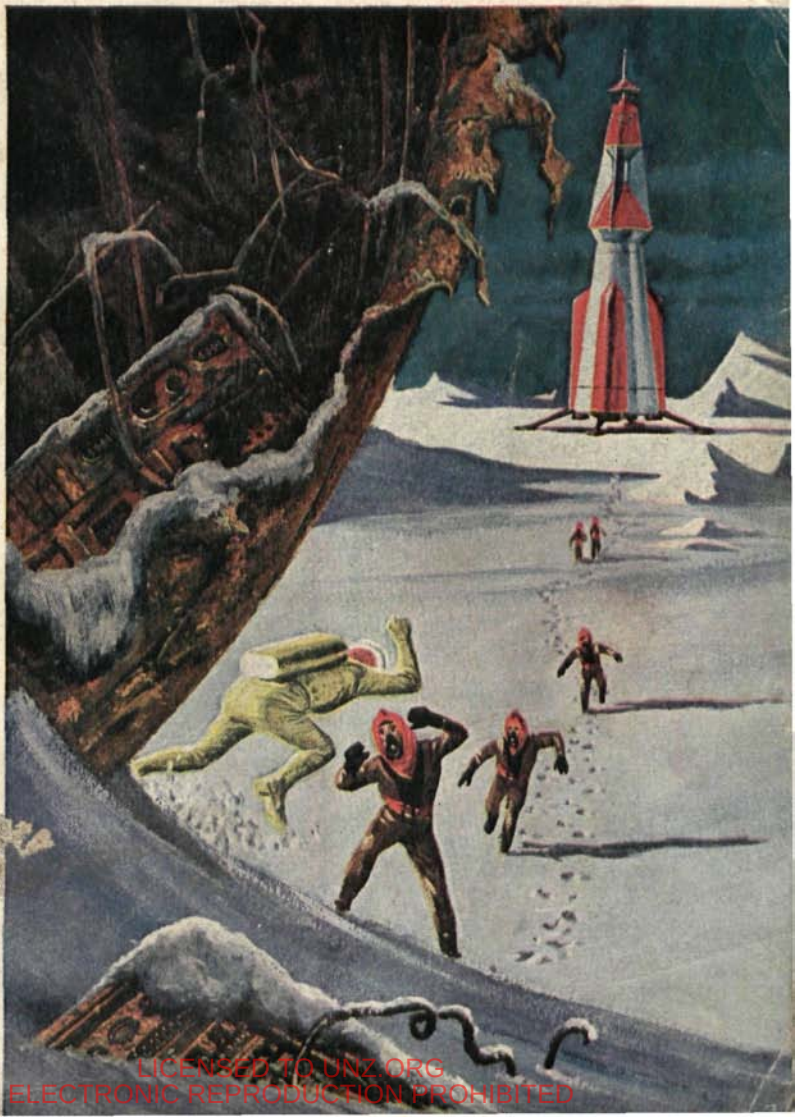
THE GREAT CONCLUSION

of

DRUNKARD'S WALK

BY FREDERIK POHL

and many other stories



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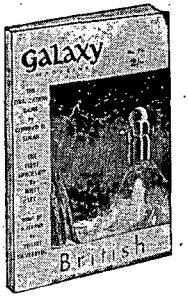

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Cover by EMSH: *Madman in the wreckage*

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READERS ON ALIENS

SHAW, I think it was, asked why a man was antagonistic toward him, said, "I can't imagine why. I haven't done anything for him." The Chinese, unlike the rest of us, knew this unlovely attribute was not true only of the next guy and made anyone who saved a life responsible for that life ever after. Most favor-doing, of course, is not life and death, so Mark Twain, in noting that friendship can survive anything but a small loan, had more ancient and infinite wisdom than the Chinese.

To claim membership in the human race (the flaw, luckily, seems confined only to mankind —*at least so far*), I can't disclaim the attribute. But where contributions to this magazine are concerned, I couldn't be more grateful.

For instance, to Alex Eisenstein, Chicago, Ill., who writes: "Having read all your 'There Are Aliens Among Us' articles, I wonder why you never brought in the fact that during the Ice Age, the Cro-Magnon man had a slightly larger brain size (proportionally) than *Homo sapiens sapiens* (not a misprint; a subspecies). Is it possible that this is the result of some great (maybe accidental) galactic interbreeding? And what about the fact that there are some human beings with six (count 'em, six) *well-proportioned* fingers, and that this is a *dominant, inherited* characteristic? Another galactic hybrid? It is a well-known fact, I am sure, that all amphibian, reptilian, and mammalian animals are based on an original five-digit hand or foot, and that all of these animals (except in this instance) have no more than *five* fingers . . .

"There is another and more sinister mystery with us now, however. Did you ever stop to think that the whole order of primates might be alien? Consider the facts: 1) the blood cells of primates differ from other mammalian blood cells in that they have no nuclei (at least, they contain no nuclei when mature); 2) the skin of man and the primates is tight against the musculature . . . whereas other mammals have loose skins (an example of this is the loose 'scruff' of the neck in cats, rabbits, etc.); 3) and finally, the female primates have the mammary glands situated on the upper part of the torso, while the other average, run-of-the-mill

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mammals have them in the lower region.

"Still, I must concede that the home planet for us primates must be inhabited by some very Earth-type creatures. There are very many more similarities to 'Terran' mammals than there are differences. But who knows?"

The answer may be in this clipping from the *Florida Alligator,* a campus newspaper, reading: "The University of Florida has hit a record enrollment of 12,710 . . . Male students comprise 8,908 of the total, while female students make up the other 3,274." The unnamed student who sent it in shakily points out: "The figures for male and female students, when subtracted from the total, leave 528 of *something* left over. Are they going to school here to find out more about us?"

What more is there to find out after a few classes and dates? If the chap up ahead is right, interbreeding could be the answer. Check nuclei, skin tight against the musculature, mammary gland location—in that order, if possible. Remember what Mother and Dear Abby told you. The somethings may not think more of you if you wait till after the altar, but you'll be able to take out skip insurance. That's better than sending a rhesus monkey in a five-four-three-two-one-damn-countdown rocket to bring them back, isn't it?

Writes Charles Aylworth, Eugene, Oregon: "The combination letter-and-editorial column is the *best* new idea in years . . . About the Aliens Among Us: In our town there is a plumber named Jessie Godlove; on his trucks he has put 'Godlove the Plumber.' Another man, Ike Blood, has on his fuel trucks 'Heat with Blood.' It is apparent that religion takes a practical turn on Jessie's world. I'd rather not speculate on Ike's."

Gory, no doubt of it, but blood is also a great coolant when warm instead of cold. By using this trick, we mammals carry our thermal environment with us into arctic or tropics. An external supply for heat may be as big an improvement over ours as ours is over reptiles'. Contrary to opinion, not all aliens are reticent. So ask.

Writes Simon A. Stricklen, Jr., Auburn, Alabama: "You have omitted the most important and effective subversion by the invaders—temporal theft. On the alien world, the time is of a much poorer quality than ours. It is as repellent to them as to us, and for this reason they want to conquer us and enjoy our fine time while we suffer theirs. . . For example, when I'm with my favorite girl, my watch says four hours have passed, while my senses, in which I have much more confi-

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dence, inform me it's only minutes. For the opposite example, fishermen friends of mine tell me that a whole day can drag by in an hour, and I have many other such reports from reliable sources. . . . With this enormous backlog of first-rate time, the aliens could jig right in—and imagine us trying to repel the invasion, dragged down by that irritable, depressed feeling caused by a softening-up bombardment of second-rate time!"

Invasion? They're doing fine with their low-cost theft, judging by your data, and by the next item, sent in by an unknown reader, which appeared in the Glens Falls, N. Y., Post-Star:

NOTICE

The undersigned, as of date of this notice, is no longer interested in or a participant in or has any opinions on anything of a neighborhood, community, city, township, county, state, national, international, political, government, or controversial nature. The undersigned's sole interests are: 1. Family. 2. Business.

Clifford B. Witham

Writes George Bond, Montreal: "The mounting evidence does indubitably show There Are Aliens Among Us. Analysis of your analyses bears out your contention that we're host not to one kind or another but a great many. Some may indeed intend to take over the Earth, but they don't stand a chance; the meek are scheduled to inherit it. They also seem to be going about the job clumsily. Take the Tidal Bore at the Petitcodiac River, for instance, in New Brunswick. The Bay of Fundy has the highest tides on Earth. At low tide, the river bottom is dry enough to walk across, and so is the ocean floor between St. Andrews and Minister's Island, where you can cross by car. A minute later, the Tidal Bore comes pounding over ocean floor and up the river. And near by is Magnetic Hill, which hauls a car right up a steep road with motor and brakes off. Both are great tourist attractions, so that part's smart. But a 60-foot tide that gets only an occasional victim and a magnetic hill that gets none I know of—these are weapons? Why, our own highways chalk up more kills to the dollar, or credit, or whatever unit the war profiteers who got these outrageous contracts use!"

As of even date, Disneyland is not trying to swallow up California, though it's every bit as good a tourist attraction; the highways leading to them could be the actual weapons—yet they're built by us—or are they?

— H. L. GOLD

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Calder had reason to worry — why was he being offered a reward that couldn't be bigger — to break up a dope ring that couldn't be tinier?

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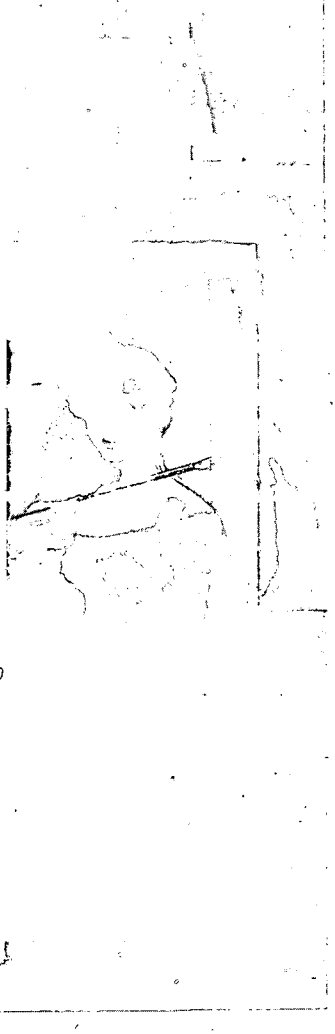
Mind Partner

By CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

Illustrated by CARTER



JIM Calder studied the miniature mansion and grounds that sat, carefully detailed, on the table.

"If you slip," said Walters, standing at Jim's elbow, "the whole gang will disappear like startled fish. There'll be another thousand addicts, and we'll have the whole thing to do over again."

Jim ran his hand up the shuttered, four-story replica tower that stood at one corner of the mansion. "I'm to knock at the front door and say, 'May I speak to Miss Cynthia?'"

Walters nodded. "You'll be taken inside, you'll stay overnight, and the next morning you will come out a door at the rear and drive away. You will come directly here, be hospitalized and examined, and tell us everything you can remember. A certified check in five figures will be deposited in your account. How high the five figures will be depends on how much your information is worth to us."

"Five figures," said Jim.

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Walters took out a cigar and sat down on the edge of his desk. "That's right — 10,000 to 99,999."

Jim said, "It's the size of the check that makes me hesitate. Am I likely to come out of there in a box?"

"No." Walters stripped the cellophane wrapper off his cigar, lit it, and sat frowning. At last he let out a long puff of smoke and looked up. "We've hit this setup twice before in the last three years. A city of moderate size, a quietly retired elderly person in a well-to-do part of town, a house so situated that people can come and go without causing comment." Walters glanced at the model of mansion and grounds on the table. "Each time, when we were sure where the trouble was coming from, we've raided the place. We caught addicts, but otherwise the house was empty."

"Fingerprints?"

"The first time, yes, but we couldn't trace them anywhere. The second time, the house burned down before we could find out."

"What about the addicts, then?"

"They don't talk. They — " Walters started to say something, then shook his head. "We're offering you a bonus because we don't know what the drug is. These people are addicted to something, but *what?* They don't accept reality. There are none of the usual withdrawal symptoms. A number of them have been hospitalized for three years and have shown no improvement. We don't *think* this will happen to you — one exposure to it shouldn't make you an addict — but we don't *know*. We have a lot of angry relatives of these people backing us. That's why we can afford to pay you what we think the risk is worth."

Jim scowled. "Before I make up my mind, I'd better see one of these addicts."

Walters drew thoughtfully on his cigar, then nodded and picked up the phone.

BEHIND the doctor and Walters and two white-coated attendants, Jim went into the room at the hospital. The attendants stood against the wall. Jim and Walters stood near the door and watched.

A blonde girl sat motionless on the cot, her head in her hands.

"Janice," said the doctor softly. "Will you talk to us for just a moment?"

The girl sat unmoving, her head in her hands, and stared at the floor.

The doctor dropped to a half-kneeling position beside the cot. "We want to talk to you, Janice. We need your help. Now, I am going to talk to you until you show me you hear me. You do hear me, don't you, Janice?"

The girl didn't move.

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The doctor repeated her name again and again.

Finally she raised her head and looked through him. In a flat, ugly voice, she said, "Leave me alone. I know what you're trying to do."

"We want to ask you just a few questions, Janice."

The girl didn't answer. The doctor started to say something else, but she cut him off.

"Go away," she said bitterly. "You don't fool me. You don't even exist. You're nothing." She had a pretty face, but as her eyes narrowed and her lips drew slightly away from her teeth and she leaned forward on the cot, bringing her hands up, she had a look that tingled the hair on the back of Jim's neck.

The two attendants moved warily away from the wall.

The doctor stayed where he was and talked in a low, soothing monotone.

The girl's eyes gradually unfocused, and she was looking through the doctor as if he weren't there. She put her head hard back into her hands and stared at the floor.

The doctor slowly came to his feet and stepped back.

"That's it," he told Jim and Walters.

ON the way back, Walters drove, and Jim sat beside him on the front seat. It was just starting to get dark outside. Abruptly Walters asked, "What did you think of it?"

Jim moved uneasily. "Are they all like that?"

"No. That's just one pattern. An example of another pattern is the man who bought a revolver, shot the storekeeper who sold it to him, shot the other customer in the store, put the gun in his belt, went behind the counter and took out a shotgun, shot a policeman who came in the front door, went outside and took a shot at the lights on a theater marquee; he studied the broken lights for a moment, then leaned the shotgun against the storefront, pulled out the revolver, blew out the right rear tires of three cars parked at the curb, stood looking from one of the cars to another and said, 'I just can't be sure, that's all.' "

Walters slowed slightly as they came onto a straight stretch of highway and glanced at Jim. "Another policeman shot the man, and that ended that. We traced that one back to the *second* place we closed up, the place that burned down before we could make a complete search."

"Were these places all run by the same people?"

"Apparently. When we checked the dates, we found that the second place didn't open till after the first was closed, and the third place till the second was closed. They've all operated in the same way. But the few descriptions we've had of the people who work there don't check."

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Jim scowled and glanced out the window. "What generally happens when people go there? Do they stay overnight, or what?"

"The first time, they go to the front door, and come out the next morning. After that, they generally rent one of the row of garages on the Jayne Street side of the property, and come back at intervals, driving in after dark and staying till the next night. They lose interest in their usual affairs, and gradually begin to seem remote to the people around them. Finally they use up their savings, or otherwise come to the end of the money they can spend. Then they do like the girl we saw tonight, or like the man in the gun store, or else they follow some other incomprehensible pattern. By the time we find the place and close it up, there are seven hundred to twelve hundred addicts within a fifty-mile radius of the town. They all fall off their rockers inside the same two- to three-week period, and for a month after that, the police and the hospitals get quite a workout."

"Don't they have any of the drug around?"

"That's just it. They must get it all at the place. They use it there. They don't bring any out."

"And when you close the place up—"

"The gang evaporates like a sliver of dry ice. They don't leave any drug or other evidence behind. This time we've got a precise model of their layout. We should be able to plan a perfect capture. But if we just close in on them, I'm afraid the same thing will happen all over again."

"Okay," said Jim. "I'm your man. But if I don't come out the next morning, I want you to come in after me."

"We will," said Walters.

JIM spent a good part of the evening thinking about the girl he'd seen at the hospital, and the gun-store addicts Walters had described. He paced the floor, scowling, and several times reached for the phone to call Walters and say, "No." A hybrid combination of duty and the thought of a five-figure check stopped him.

Finally, unable to stay put, he went out into the warm, dark evening, got in his car and drove around town. On impulse, he swung down Jayne Street and passed the dark row of rented garages Walters had mentioned. A car was carefully backing out as he passed. He turned at the next corner and saw the big, old-fashioned house moonlit among the trees on its own grounds. A faint sensation of wrongness bothered him, and he pulled to the curb to study the house.

Seen through the trees, the house was tall and steep-roofed. It reached far back on its land, sur-

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rounded by close-trimmed lawn and shadowy shrubs. The windows were tall and narrow, some of them closed by louvered shutters. Pale light shone out through the narrow openings of the shutters.

Unable to place the sensation of wrongness, Jim swung the car away from the curb and drove home. He parked his car, and, feeling tired and ready for sleep, walked up the dark drive, climbed the steps to the porch, and fished in his pocket for his keycase. He felt for the right key in the darkness, and moved back onto the steps to get a little more light. It was almost as dark there as on the porch. Puzzled, he glanced up at the sky.

The stars were out, with a heavy mass of clouds in the distance, and a few small clouds sliding by overheard. The edge of one of the small clouds lit up faintly, and as it passed, a pale crescent moon hung in the sky. Jim looked around. Save for the light in the windows, the houses all bulked dark.

Jim went down the steps to his car and drove swiftly back along Jayne Street. He turned, drove a short distance up the side street, and parked.

This time, the outside of the huge house was dark. Bright light shone out the shutters onto the lawn and shrubbery. But the house was a dark bulk against the sky.

Jim swung the car out from the curb and drove home slowly.

THE next morning, he went early to Walters' office and studied the model that sat on the table near the desk. The model, painstakingly constructed from enlarged photographs, showed nothing that looked like a camouflaged arrangement for softly floodlighting the walls of the house and the grounds. Jim studied the location of the trees, looked at the house from a number of angles, noticed the broken slats in different shutters on the fourth floor of the tower, but saw nothing else he hadn't seen before.

He called up Wal[illegible] home having breakfast, and without mentioning details asked, "Is this model on your table complete?"

Walters' voice said, "It's complete up to three o'clock the day before yesterday. We check it regularly."

Jim thanked him and hung up, unsatisfied. He knelt down and put his eye in the position of a man in the street in front of the house. He noticed that certain parts of the trees were blocked off from view by the mansion. Some of these parts could be photographed from a light plane flying overhead, but other positions would be hidden by foliage. Jim told himself that floodlights *must* be hidden high in

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the trees, in such a way that they could simulate moonlight.

In that case, the question was—why?

Jim studied the model. He was bothered by much the same sensation as that of a man examining the random parts of a jigsaw puzzle. The first few pieces fitted together, the shapes and colors matched, but they didn't seem to add up to anything he had ever seen before.

AS he drove out to the house, the day was cool and clear.

The house itself, by daylight, seemed to combine grace, size, and a sort of starched aloofness. It was painted a pale lavender, with a very dark, steeply slanting roof. Tall arching trees rose above it, shading parts of the roof, the grounds, and the shrubs. The lawn was closely trimmed, and bordered by a low spike-topped black-iron fence.

Jim pulled in to the curb in front of the house, got out, opened a low wrought-iron gate in the fence, and started up the walk. He glanced up at the trees, saw nothing of floodlights, then looked at the house.

The house had a gracious, neat, well-groomed appearance. All the window-panes shone, all the shades were even, all the curtains neatly hung, all the trim bright and the shutters straight. Jim, close to the house, raised his eyes to the tower. All the shutters there were perfect and even and straight.

The sense of wrongness that had bothered him the day before was back again. He paused in his stride, frowning.

The front door opened and a plump, gray-haired woman in a light-blue maid's uniform stood in the doorway. With her left hand, she smoothed her white apron.

"My," she said, smiling, "isn't it a nice day?" She stepped back and with her left hand opened the door wider. "Come in." Her right hand remained at her side, half-hidden by the ruffles of her apron.

Jim's mouth felt dry. "May I," he said, "speak to Miss Cynthia?"

"Of course you may," said the woman. She shut the door behind him.

They were in a small vestibule opening into a high-ceilinged hallway. Down the hall, Jim could see an open staircase to the second floor, and several wide doorways with heavy dark draperies.

"Go straight ahead and up the stairs," said the woman in a pleasant voice. "Turn left at the head of the stairs. Miss Cynthia is in the second room on the right."

Jim took one step. There was a sudden sharp pressure on his skull, a flash of white light, and a piercing pain and a pressure in his right arm—a sensation like that of an injection. Then there was nothing but blackness.

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GRADUALLY he became aware that he was lying on a bed, with a single cover over him. He opened his eyes to see that he was in an airy room with a light drapery blowing in at the window. He started to sit up and his head throbbed. The walls of the room leaned out and came back. For an instant, he saw the room like a photographic negative, the white woodwork black and the dark furniture nearly white. He lay carefully back on the pillow and the room returned to normal.

He heard the quick tap of high heels in the hallway and a door opened beside him. He turned his head. The room seemed to spin in circles around him. He shut his eyes.

When he opened his eyes again, a tall, dark-haired woman was watching him with a faint hint of a smile. "How do you feel?"

"Not good," said Jim.

"It's too bad we have to do it this way, but some people lose their nerve. Others come with the thought that we have a profitable business and they would like to have a part of it. We have to bring these people around to our way of thinking."

"What's your way of thinking?"

She looked at him seriously. "What we have to offer is worth far more than any ordinary pattern of life. We can't let it fall into the wrong hands."

"What is it that you have to offer?"

She smiled again. "I can't tell you as well as you can experience it."

"That may be. But a man going into a strange country likes to have a road map."

"That's very nicely put," she said, "but you won't be going into any strange country. What we offer you is nothing but your reasonable desires in life."

"Is that all?"

"It's enough."

"Is there any danger of addiction?"

"After you taste steak, is there any danger of your wanting more? After you hold perfect beauty in your arms, is there any danger you might want to do so again? The superior is always addicting."

He looked at her for a moment. "And how about my affairs? Will they suffer?"

"That depends on you."

"What if I go from here straight to the police station?"

"You won't. Once we are betrayed, you can never come back. We won't be here. You wouldn't want that."

"Do you give me anything to take out? Can I buy—"

"No," she said. "You can't take anything out but your memories. You'll find they will be enough."

As she said this, Jim had a clear mental picture of the girl sitting on

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the cot in the hospital, staring at the floor. He felt a sudden intense desire to get out. He started to sit up, and the room darkened and spun around him.

HE felt the woman's cool hands ease him back into place.

"Now," she said, "do you have any more questions?"

"No," said Jim.

"Then," she said briskly, "we can get down to business. The charge for your first series of three visits is one thousand dollars per visit."

"What about the next visits?"

"Must we discuss that now?"

"I'd like to know."

"The charge for each succeeding series of three is doubled."

"How often do I come back?"

"We don't allow anyone to return oftener than once every two weeks. That is for your own protection."

Jim did a little mental arithmetic, and estimated that by the middle of the year a man would have to pay sixteen thousand dollars a visit, and by the end of the year it would be costing him a quarter of a million each time he came to the place.

"Why," he asked, "does the cost increase?"

"Because, I've been told to tell those who ask, your body acquires a tolerance and we have to overcome it. If we have to use twice as much of the active ingredient in our treatment, it seems fair for us to charge twice as much."

"I see." Jim cautiously eased himself up a little. "And suppose that I decide right now not to pay anything at all."

She shook her head impatiently. "You're on a one-way street. The only way you can go is forward."

"That remains to be seen."

"Then you'll see."

She stepped to a dresser against the wall, picked up an atomizer, turned the little silver nozzle toward him, squeezed the white rubber bulb, and set the atomizer back on the dresser. She opened the door and went out. Jim felt a mist of fine droplets falling on his face. He tried to inhale very gently to see if it had an odor. His muscles wouldn't respond.

He lay very still for a moment and felt the droplets falling one by one. They seemed to explode and tingle as they touched his skin. He lay still a moment more, braced himself to make one lunge out of the bed, then tried it.

He lay flat on his back on the bed. A droplet tingled and exploded on his cheek.

He was beginning to feel a strong need for breath.

He braced himself once more, simply to move sidewise off the pillow. Once there, he could get further aside in stages, out of the range of the droplets. He kept

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thinking, "Just a moment now — steady — just a moment — just — Now!"

And nothing happened.

He lay flat on his back on the bed. A droplet tingled and exploded on his cheek.

The need for air was becoming unbearable.

JIM'S head was throbbing and the room went dark with many tiny spots of light. He tried to suck in air and he couldn't. He tried to breathe out, but his chest and lungs didn't move. He could hear the pound of his heart growing fast and loud.

He couldn't move.

At the window, the light drapery fluttered and blew in and fell back.

He lay flat on the bed and felt a droplet tingle and explode on his cheek.

His skull was throbbing. His heart writhed and hammered in his chest. The room was going dark.

Then something gave way and his lungs were dragging in painful gasps of fresh air. He sobbed like a runner at the end of a race. After a long time, a feeling of peace and tiredness came over him.

The door opened.

He looked up. The woman was watching him sadly. "I'm sorry," she said. "Do you want to discuss payment?"

Jim nodded.

The woman sat down in a chair by the bed. "As I've explained, the initial series of three visits cost one thousand dollars each. We will accept a personal check or even an I. O. U. for the first payment. After that, you must have cash."

Jim made out a check for one thousand dollars.

The woman nodded, smiled, and folded the check into a small purse. She went out, came back with a glass of colorless liquid, shook a white powder into it, and handed it to him.

"Drink it all," she said. "A little bit can be excruciatingly painful."

Jim hesitated. He sat up a little and began to feel dizzy. He decided he had better do as she said, took the glass and drained it. It tasted exactly like sodium bicarbonate dissolved in water. He handed her the glass and she went to the door.

"The first experiences," she said, "are likely to be a little exuberant. Remember, your time sense will be distorted, as it is in a dream." She went out and shut the door softly.

Jim fervently wished he were somewhere else. He wondered what she had meant by the last comment. The thought came to him that if he could get out of this place, he could give Walters and the doctors a chance to see the drug in action.

He got up, and had the momen-

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tary sensation of doing two things at once. He seemed to lie motionless on the bed and to stand up at one and the same time. He wondered if the drug could have taken effect already. He lay down and got up again. This time he felt only a little dizzy. He went to the window and looked out. He was in a second-story window, and the first-floor rooms in this house had high ceilings. Moreover, he now discovered he was wearing a sort of hospital gown. He couldn't go into the street in that without causing a sensation, and he didn't know just when the drug would take effect.

HE heard the soft click of the door opening and turned around. The woman who had talked to him came in and closed the door gently behind her. Jim watched in a daze as she turned languorously, and it occurred to him that no woman he had ever seen had moved quite like that, so the chances were that the drug had taken effect and he was imagining all this. He remembered that she had said the first experiences were likely to be a little exuberant, and his time sense distorted as in a dream.

Jim spent the night, if it was the night, uncertain as to what was real and what was due to the drug. But it was all vivid, and realistic events shaded into adventures he *knew* were imaginary, but that were so bright and satisfying that he didn't care if they were real or not. In these adventures, the colors were pure colors, and the sounds were clear sounds, and nothing was muddied or uncertain as in life.

It was so vivid and clear that when he found himself lying on the bed with the morning sun streaming in, he was astonished that he could remember not a single incident save the first, and that one not clearly.

He got up and found his clothes lying on a chair by the bed. He dressed rapidly, glanced around for the little atomizer and saw it was gone. He stepped out into the hall and there was a sudden sharp pressure on his skull, a flash of white light, and a feeling of limpness. He felt strong hands grip and carry him. He felt himself hurried down a flight of steps, along a corridor, then set down with his back against a wall.

When he felt strong enough to, he opened his eyes.

The plump, gray-haired woman took a damp cloth and held it to his head. "You'll be all over that in a little while," she said. "I don't see why they have to do that."

"Neither do I," said Jim. He felt reasonably certain that she had done the same thing to him when he came in. He looked around, saw that they were in a small bare entry, and got cautiously to his

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feet. "Is my car still out front?"

"No," she said. "It's parked in back, in the drive."

"Thank you," he said. "Say good-by to Miss Cynthia for me."

The woman smiled. "You'll be back."

He was very much relieved to get outside the house. He walked back along the wide graveled drive, found his car, got in, and started it. When he reached the front of the house, he slowed the car to glance back. To his surprise, the two shutters on the third floor of the tower had broken slats. He thought this had some significance, but he was unable to remember what it was. He sat for a moment, puzzled, then decided that the important thing was to get to Walters. He swung the car out into the early morning traffic, and settled back with a feeling compounded of nine parts relief and one part puzzlement.

What puzzled him was that anyone should pay one thousand dollars for a second dose of that.

THE doctors made a lightning examination, announced that he seemed physically sound, and then Walters questioned him. He described the experience in close detail, and Walters listened, nodding from time to time. At the end, Jim said, "I'll be *damned* if I can see why anyone should go back!"

"That *is* puzzling," said Walters. "It may be that they were all sensation-seekers, though that's a little odd, too. Whatever the reason, it's lucky you weren't affected."

"Maybe I'd better keep my fingers crossed," said Jim.

Walters laughed. "I'll bring your bankbook in to keep you happy." He went out, and a moment later the doctors were in again. It wasn't until the next morning that they were willing to let him go. Just as he was about to leave, one of them remarked to him, "I hope you never need a blood transfusion in a hurry."

"Why so?" Jim asked.

"You have one of the rarest combinations I've ever seen." He held out an envelope. "Walters said to give you this."

Jim opened it. It was a duplicate deposit slip for a sum as high as five figures could go.

Jim went out to a day that wasn't sunny, but looked just as good to him as if it had been.

After careful thought, Jim decided to use the money to open a detective agency of his own. Walters, who caught the dope gang trying to escape through an unused steam tunnel, gave Jim his blessing, and the offer of a job if things went wrong.

Fortunately, things went very well. Jim's agency prospered. In time, he found the right girl, they married, and had two boys and a girl. The older boy became a doc-

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tor, and the girl married a likable fast-rising young lawyer. The younger boy had a series of unpleasant scrapes and seemed bound on wrecking his life. Jim, who was by this time very well to do, at last offered the boy a job in his agency, and was astonished to see him take hold.

The years fled past much faster than Jim would have liked. Still, when the end came near, he had the pleasure of knowing that his life's work would be in the capable hands of his own son.

He breathed his last breath in satisfaction.

And woke up lying on a bed in a room where a light drapery blew back at the window and the morning sun shone in, and his clothes were folded on a chair by his bed.

JIM sat up very carefully. He held his hand in front of his face and turned it over slowly. It was not the hand of an old man. He got up and looked in a mirror, then sat down on the edge of the bed. He was young, all right. The question was, was this an old man's nightmare, or was the happy life he had just lived a dope addict's dream?

He remembered the woman who had doped him saying, "What we offer you is nothing but your reasonable desires in life."

Then it had all been a dream.

But a dream should go away, and this remained clear in his memory.

He dressed, went out in the hall, felt a sudden pressure on his skull, a flash of white light, and a feeling of limpness.

He came to in the small entry, and the plump, gray-haired woman carefully held a damp cool cloth to his head.

"Thanks," he said. "Is my car out back?"

"Yes," she said, and he went out.

As he drove away from the house he glanced back and noticed the two broken shutters on the third floor of the tower. The memory of his dream about this same event — leaving the place — jarred him. It seemed that those broken shutters meant something, but he was unable to remember what. He trod viciously on the gas pedal, throwing a spray of gravel on the carefully tailored lawn as he swung into the street.

He *still* did not see why anyone should go back there with anything less than a shotgun.

He told Walters the whole story, including the details of his "life," that he remembered so clearly.

"You'll get over it," Walters finally said, when Jim was ready to leave the hospital. "It's a devil of a thing to have happen, but there's an achievement in it you can be proud of."

"You name it," said Jim bitterly.

"You've saved a lot of other

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people from this same thing. The doctors have analyzed the traces of drug still in your blood. They think they can neutralize it. Then we are going to put a few sturdy men inside that house, and while they're assumed to be under the influence, we'll raid the place."

The tactic worked, but Jim watched the trial with a cynical eye. He couldn't convince himself that it was true. He might, for all he knew, be lying in a second-floor room of the house on a bed, while these people, who seemed to be on trial, actually were going freely about their business.

This inability to accept what he saw as real at last forced Jim to resign his job. Using the generous bonus Walters had given him, he took up painting. As he told Walters on one of his rare visits, "It may or may not be that what I'm doing is real, but at least there's the satisfaction of the work itself."

"You're not losing any money on it," said Walters shrewdly.

"I know," said Jim, "and that makes me acutely uneasy."

On his 82nd birthday, Jim was widely regarded as the "Grand Old Man" of painting. His hands and feet felt cold that day, and he fell into an uneasy, shallow-breathing doze. He woke with a start and a choking cough. For an instant everything around him had an unnatural clarity; then it all went dark and he felt himself falling.

He awoke in a bed in a room where a light drapery fluttered at the window, and the morning sun shone into the room.

THIS time, Jim entertained no doubts as to whether or not this was real. He got up angrily and smashed his fist into the wall with all his might.

The shock and pain jolted him to his heels.

He went out the same way as before, but he had to drive one-handed, gritting his teeth all the way.

The worst of it was that the doctors weren't able to make that hand exactly right afterward. Even if the last "life" had been a dream —even if this one was—he wanted to paint. But every time he tried to, he felt so clumsy that he gave up in despair.

Walters, dissatisfied, gave Jim the minimum possible payment. The gang escaped. Jim eventually lost his job, and in the end he eked out his life at poorly paid odd jobs.

The only consolation he felt was that his life was so miserable that it must be true.

He went to bed sick one night and woke up the next morning on a bed in a room where a light drapery fluttered at the window and the early morning sun shone brightly in.

This happened to him twice more.

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The next time after that, he lay still on the bed and stared at the ceiling. The incidents and details of five lives danced in his mind like jabbering monkeys. He pressed his palms to his forehead and wished he could forget it all.

The door opened softly and the tall, dark-haired woman was watching him with a faint smile. "I told you," she said, "that you couldn't take anything away but memories."

He looked up at her sickly. "That seems like a long, long while ago."

She nodded and sat down. "Your time sense is distorted as in a dream."

"I wish," he said drearily, looking at her, "that I could just forget it all. I don't see why anyone would come back for more of that."

She leaned forward to grip the edge of the mattress, shaking with laughter. She sat up again. "Whew!" she said, looking at him and forcing her face to be straight. "Nobody comes back for *more*. That is the unique quality of this drug. People come back to forget they ever had it."

He sat up. "I can forget that?"

"Oh, yes. *Don't* get so excited! That's what you really paid your thousand dollars for. The forgetfulness drug lingers in your bloodstream for two to three weeks. Then memory returns and you're due for another visit."

Jim looked at her narrowly. "Does my body become tolerant of this drug? Does it take twice as much after three visits, four times as much after six visits, eight times as much after nine visits?"

"No."

"Then you lied to me."

SHE looked at him oddly. "What would you have expected of me? But I didn't lie to you. I merely said that that was what I was told to tell those who asked."

"Then what's the point of it?" Jim asked.

"What's the point of bank robbery?" She frowned at him. "You ask a lot of questions. Aren't you lucky I know the answers? Ordinarily you wouldn't get around to this till you'd stewed for a few weeks. But you seem precocious, so I'll tell you."

"That's nice," he said.

"The main reason for the impossible rates is so you can't pay off in money."

"How does that help you?"

"Because," she said, "every time you bring us a new patron, you get three free visits yourself."

"Ah," he said.

"It needn't be so terribly unpleasant, coming here."

"What happens if, despite everything, some sorehead actually goes and tells the police about this?"

"We move."

"Suppose they catch you?"

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"They won't. Or, at least, it isn't likely."

"But you'll leave?"

"Yes."

"What happens to me?"

"Don't you see? We'll *have* to leave. Someone will have betrayed us. We couldn't stay because it might happen again. It isn't right from your viewpoint, but we can't take chances."

For a few moments they didn't talk, and the details of Jim's previous "lives" came pouring in on him. He sat up suddenly. "Where's that forgetfulness drug?"

She went outside and came back with a glass of colorless liquid. She poured in a faintly pink powder and handed it to him. He drank it quickly and it tasted like bicarbonate of soda dissolved in water.

He looked at her. "This isn't the same thing all over again, is it?"

"Don't worry," she said. "You'll forget."

The room began to go dark. He leaned back. The last thing he was conscious of was her cool hand on his forehead, then the faint click as she opened the door to go out.

He sat up. He dressed, drove quickly to Walters and told him all he could remember. Walters immediately organized his raid. Jim saw the place closed up with no one caught.

After two weeks and four days, the memories flooded back. His life turned into a nightmare. At every turn, the loves, hates, and tiny details of six separate lives poured in on him. He tried drugs in an attempt to forget, and sank from misery to hopeless despair. He ended up in a shooting scrap as Public Enemy Number Four.

And then he awoke and found himself in a bed in a room with a light drapery blowing in at the window, and the early morning sun shining brightly in.

"Merciful God!" he said.

The door clicked shut.

JIM sprang to the door and looked out in the carpeted hall. There was the flash of a woman's skirt; then a tall narrow door down the hallway closed to shut off his view.

He drew back into the room and shut the door. The house was quiet. In the distance, on the street, he could hear the faint sound of a passing car.

He swallowed hard. He glanced at the window. It had been, he reasoned, early morning when he had talked to the woman last. It was early morning now. He recalled that before she went out she said, "You'll forget." He had then lived his last miserable "life"—and awakened to hear the click as the door came shut behind her.

That had all taken less than five seconds of actual time.

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He found his clothes on a nearby chair and started to dress. As he did so, he realized for the first time that the memories of his "lives" were no longer clear to him. They were fading away, almost as the memories of a dream do after a man wakes and gets up. *Almost* as the memories of a dream, but not quite. Jim found that if he thought of them, they gradually became clear again.

He tried to forget and turned his attention to the tree he could see through the window. He looked at the curve of its boughs, and at a black-and-yellow bird balancing on a branch in the breeze.

The memories faded away, and he began to plan what to do. No sooner did he do this than he remembered with a shock that he had said to Walters, "If I don't come out next morning, I want you to come in after me."

And Walters had said, "We will."

So that must have been just last night.

Jim finished dressing, took a deep breath, and held out his hand. It looked steady. He opened the door, stepped out into the hall, and an instant too late remembered what had happened six times before.

When he opened his eyes, the plump, gray-haired woman was holding a damp cloth to his forehead and clucking sympathetically.

Jim got carefully to his feet, and walked down the drive to his car. He slid into the driver's seat, started the engine, and sat still a moment, thinking. Then he released the parking brake, and pressed lightly on the gas pedal. The car slid smoothly ahead, the gravel of the drive crunching under its tires. He glanced up as the car reached the end of the drive, and looked back at the tower. Every slat in the shutters was perfect. Jim frowned, trying to remember something. Then he glanced up and down the street, and swung out into the light early morning traffic.

He wasted no time getting to Walters.

HE was greeted with an all-encompassing inspection that traveled from Jim's head to his feet. Walters looked tense. He took a cigar from a box on his desk and put it in his mouth unlit.

"I've spent half the night telling myself there are some things you can't ask a man to do for money. But we *had* to do it. Are you all right?"

"At the moment."

"There are doctors and medical technicians in the next room. Do you want to see them now or later?"

"Right now."

In the next hour, Jim took off his clothes, stood up, lay down, looked into bright lights, winced as

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a sharp hollow needle was forced into his arm, gave up samples of bodily excretions, sat back as electrodes were strapped to his skin, and at last was reassured that he would be all right. He dressed, and found himself back in Walters' office.

Walters looked at him sympathetically.

"How do you feel?"

"Starved."

"I'll have breakfast sent in." He snapped on his intercom, gave the order, then leaned back. He picked up his still unlit cigar, lit it, puffed hard, and said, "What happened?"

Jim told him, starting with the evening before, and ending when he swung his car out into traffic this morning.

Walters listened with a gathering frown, drawing occasionally on the cigar.

A breakfast of scrambled eggs and Canadian bacon was brought in. Walters got up, and looked out the window, staring down absently at the traffic moving past in the street below. Jim ate with single-minded concentration, and finally pushed his plate back and looked up.

Walters ground his cigar butt in the ashtray and lit a fresh cigar. "This is a serious business. You say you remembered the details of each of those six lives *clearly?*"

"Worse than that. I remembered the emotions and the attachments. In the first life, for instance, I had my own business." Jim paused and thought back. The memories gradually became clear again. "One of my men, for instance, was named Hart. He stood about five-seven, slender, with black hair, cut short when I first met him. Hart was a born actor. He could play any part. It wasn't his face. His expression hardly seemed to change. But his manner changed. He could stride into a hotel and the bellboys would jump for his bags and the desk clerk spring to attention. He stood out. He was important. Or he could slouch in the front door, hesitate, look around, blink, start to ask one of the bellboys something, lose his nerve, stiffen his shoulders, shamble over to the desk, and get unmercifully snubbed. Obviously, he was less than nobody. Or, again, he could quietly come in the front door, stroll across the lobby, fade out of sight somewhere, and hardly a person would notice or remember him. Whatever part he played, he lived it. That was what made him so valuable."

WALTERS had taken the cigar out of his mouth, and listened intently. "You mean this Hart — this imaginary man — is real to you? In three dimensions?"

"That's it. Not only that, I like him. There were other, stronger attachments. I had a family."

"Which seems real?"

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Jim nodded. "I realize as I say these things that I sound like a lunatic."

"No." Walters shook his head sympathetically. "It all begins to make sense. Now I see why the girl at the hospital said to the doctor, 'You aren't real.' Does it *hurt* to talk about these 'lives'?"

Jim hesitated. "Not as long as we keep away from the personal details. But it hurt like nothing I can describe to have all six of these sets of memories running around in my head at once."

"I can imagine. All right, let's track down some of these memories and see how far the details go."

Jim nodded. "Okay."

Walters got out a bound notebook and pen. "We'll start with your business. What firm name did you use?"

"Calder Associates."

"Why?"

"It sounded dignified, looked good on a business card or letterhead, and wasn't specific."

"What was your address?"

"Four North Street. Earlier, it was 126 Main."

"How many men did you have working with you?"

"To begin with, just Hart, and another man by the name of Dean. At the end, there were twenty-seven."

"What were their names?"

Jim called them off one by one, without hesitation.

Walters blinked. "Say that over again a little more slowly."

Jim repeated the list.

"All right," said Walters. "Describe these men."

Jim described them. He gave more and more details as Walters pressed for them, and by lunch time, Walters had a large section of the notebook filled.

The two men ate, and Walters spent the rest of the afternoon quizzing Jim on his first "life." Then they had steak and French fries sent up to the office. Walters ate in silence for a moment, then said, "Do you realize that you haven't stumbled once?"

JIM looked up in surprise. "What do you mean?"

Walters said, "Quiz me on the names of every man who ever worked for me. I won't remember all of them. Not by a long shot. You remember every last detail of this dream life with a total recall that beats anything I've ever seen."

"That's the trouble. That's why it's pleasant to forget."

Walters asked suddenly, "Did you ever paint? *Actually*, I mean. I ask because you say you were an outstanding painter in one of these 'lives.'"

"When I was a boy, I painted some. I wanted to be an artist."

"Can you come out to my place tonight? I'd like to see whether you can really handle the brushes."

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Jim nodded. "Yes, I'd like to try that."

They drove out together, and Walters got out a dusty paint set in a wooden case, set up a folding easel, and put a large canvas on it.

Jim stood still a moment, thinking back. Then he began to paint. He lost himself in the work, as he always had, all through the years, and what he was painting now he had painted before. Had painted it, and sold it for a good price, too. And it was worth it. He could still see the model in his mind as he painted with swift precise strokes.

He stepped back.

"My Lady in Blue" was a cheerful girl of seventeen. She smiled out from the canvas as if at any moment she might laugh or wave.

Jim glanced around. For an instant the room seemed strange. Then he remembered where he was.

Walters looked at the painting for a long moment, then looked at Jim, and swallowed. He carefully took the painting from the easel and replaced it with another blank canvas. He went across the room and got a large floor-type ashtray, a wrought-iron affair with a galloping horse for the handle.

"Paint this."

Jim looked at it. He stepped up to the canvas, hesitated. He raised the brush — and stopped. He didn't know where to begin. He frowned and carefully thought back to his first lessons. "Let's see." He glanced up. "Do you have any tracing paper?"

"Just a minute," said Walters.

Jim tacked the paper over the canvas and methodically drew the ashtray on the paper. He had a hard time, but at last looked at the paper triumphantly. "Now, do you have any transfer paper?"

Walters frowned. "I've got carbon paper."

"All right."

Walters got it. Jim put a sheet under his tracing paper, tacked it up again, and carefully went over the drawing with a pencil. He untacked the paper, then methodically began to paint. At length, weary and perspiring, he stepped back.

Walter looked at it. Jim blinked and looked again. Walters said, "A trifle off-center, isn't it?"

There was no doubt about it, the ashtray stood too far toward the upper right-hand corner of the canvas.

Walters pointed at the other painting. "Over there we have a masterpiece that you dashed off freehand. Here we have, so to speak, a piece of good, sound mechanical drawing that isn't properly placed on the canvas. This took you longer to do than the other. How come?"

"I had done the other before."

"And you remember the motions of your hand? Is that it?" He

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put another canvas up. "Do it again."

Jim frowned. He stepped forward, thought a moment, and began to paint. He lost himself in a perfection of concentration. In time, he stepped back.

Walters looked at it. He swallowed hard, glanced back and forth from this painting to the one Jim had done at first. He lifted the painting carefully from the easel and placed it beside the other.

They looked identical.

THE sun was just lighting the horizon as they drove back to the office. Walters said, "I'm going in there and sleep on the cot. Can you get back around three this afternoon?"

"Sure."

Jim drove home, slept, ate, and was back again by three.

"This is a devil of a puzzle," said Walters, leaning back at his desk and blowing out a cloud of smoke. "I've had half a dozen experts squint at one of those paintings. I've been offered five thousand, even though they don't know the artist's name. Then I showed them the other painting and they almost fell through the floor. It isn't possible, but each stroke appears identical. How do you feel?"

"Better. And I've remembered something. Let's look at your model."

They went to the big model of the mansion, and Jim touched the upper story of the tower. "Have some of the boys sketch this. Then compare the sketches with photographs."

Soon they were looking at sketches and photographs side by side. The sketches showed the tower shutters perfect. The photographs showed several slats of the shutters broken.

Walters questioned the men, who insisted the shutters were perfect. After they left, Jim said, "Everyone who sketched that place wasn't drugged. And the cameras certainly weren't drugged."

Walters said, "Let's take a look." They drove out past the mansion, and the shutters looked perfect. A new photograph showed the same broken slats.

Back at the office, Walters said, "Just what are we up against here?"

Jim said, "I can think of two possibilities."

"Let's hear them."

"Often you can do the same thing several different ways. A man, for instance, can go from one coastal town to another on foot, riding a horse, by car, by plane, or in a speedboat."

"Granted."

"A hundred years ago, the list would have been shorter."

Walter nodded thoughtfully. "I follow you. Go on."

"Whoever sees those shutters as perfect is, for the time being, in an

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abnormal mental state. How did he get there? We've assumed drugs were used. But just as there are new ways of going from one city to another, so there may be new ways of passing from one mental state to another. Take subliminal advertising, for instance. where the words, 'THIRSTY,' 'THIRSTY,' 'BEER,' may be flashed on the screen too fast to be consciously seen."

"It's illegal."

"Suppose someone found out how to do it undetected, and decided to try it out on a small scale. What about nearly imperceptible *verbal* clues instead of visual ones?"

WALTERS' eyes narrowed. "We'll analyze every sound coming out of that place and check for any kind of suspicious sensory stimulus whatever. What's your other idea?"

"Well, go back to your travel analogy. Going from one place to another, any number of animals can outrun, outfly, and outswim a man. Let Man work on the problem long enough, and roll up to the starting line in his rocket-plane, and the result will be different. But until Man has time to concentrate enough thought and effort, the nonhuman creature has an excellent chance to beat him. There are better fliers, better swimmers, better fighters, better —"

Walters frowned. "Better *suggestionists?* Like the snake that's said to weave hypnotically?"

"Yes, and the wasp that stings the trapdoor spider, when other wasps are fought off."

"Hmm. Maybe. But I incline to the subliminal advertising theory myself." He looked at the mansion. "Where would they keep the device?"

"Why not the tower?"

Walters nodded. "It's an easy place to guard, and to shut off from visitors."

Jim said, "It might explain those shutters. They might not care to risk painters and repairmen up there."

Walters knocked the ash off his cigar. "But how do we get in there to find out?"

They studied the model. Walters, "Say we send in a 'building inspector.' They'll merely knock him out, hallucinate a complete series of incidents in his mind, and send him out totally ignorant. If we try to raid the place in a group, they'll vanish with the help of that machine. But there must be *some* way."

Jim said thoughtfully, "Those trees overhang the room."

"They do, don't they?"

The two men studied the trees and the tower.

Jim touched one of the arching limbs. "What if we lowered a rope from here?"

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Walters tied an eraser on a string and fastened the string to a limb. The eraser hung by the uppermost tower winder. Walters scowled, snapped on the intercom, and asked for several of his men. Then he turned to Jim. "We'll see what Cullen thinks. He's done some jobs like this."

Cullen had sharp eyes and a mobile face that grew unhappy as he listened to Walters. Finally, he shook his head. "No, thanks. Ask me to go up a wall, or the side of a building. But not down out of a tree branch on the end of a rope."

He gave the eraser a little flip with his finger. It swung in circles, hit the wall, and bounced away.

"Say I'm actually up there. It's night. The rope swings. The limb bobs up and down. The tree sways. All to a different rhythm. I'm spinning around on the end of this rope. One second this shutter is one side of me. The next second it's on the other side and five feet away. A job is a job, but this is one I don't want."

Walters turned to Jim after Cullen went out. "That settles that."

Jim looked at the tree limb. Two or three weeks from today, he told himself, the memories would come flooding back. The people who had done it would get away, and do it again. And he would have those memories.

Jim glanced at Walters stubbornly. "I am going to climb that tree."

THE night was still, with a dark overcast sky as Jim felt the rough bark against the insides of his arms. He hitched up the belt that circled the tree, then pulled up one foot, then another as he sank the climbing irons in higher up. He could hear Cullen's advice: "Practice, study the model, do each step over and over in your head. Then, when you're actually doing it and when things get tight, *hold your mind on what to do next.* Do that. *Then* think of the next step."

Jim was doing this as the dark lawn dropped steadily away. He felt the tree trunk grow gradually more slender, then begin to widen. He worked his way carefully above the limb, refastened the belt, and felt a puff of warm air touch his face and neck, like a leftover from the warm day. Somewhere, a radio was playing.

He climbed, aware now of the rustling around him of leaves.

The trunk widened again, and he knew he was at the place where the trunk separated into the limbs that arched out to form the crown of the tree.

He pulled himself up carefully, and took his eyes from the tree for a moment to look toward the mansion. He saw the slanting tile roof of an entirely different house, light shining down from a dormer win-

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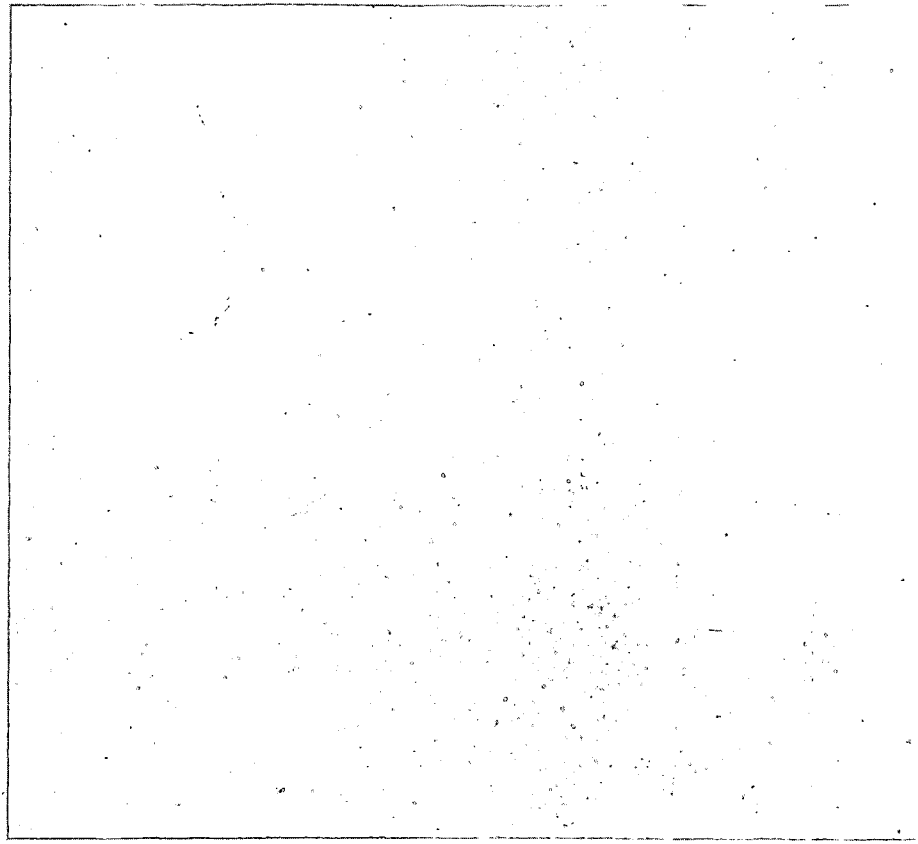

dow. He glanced around, to see the looming steep-roofed tower of the mansion in the opposite direction. He realized he must have partially circled the tree and lost his sense of direction.

He swallowed and crouched in the cleft between the limbs till he was sure he knew which limb arched over the tower. He fastened the belt and started slowly up.

As he climbed, the limb arched, to become more and more nearly horizontal. At the same time, the limb became more slender. It began to respond to his movements, swaying slightly as he climbed. Now he was balancing on it, the steep roof of the tower shining faintly ahead of him. He remembered that he had to take off the climbing irons, lest they foul in the

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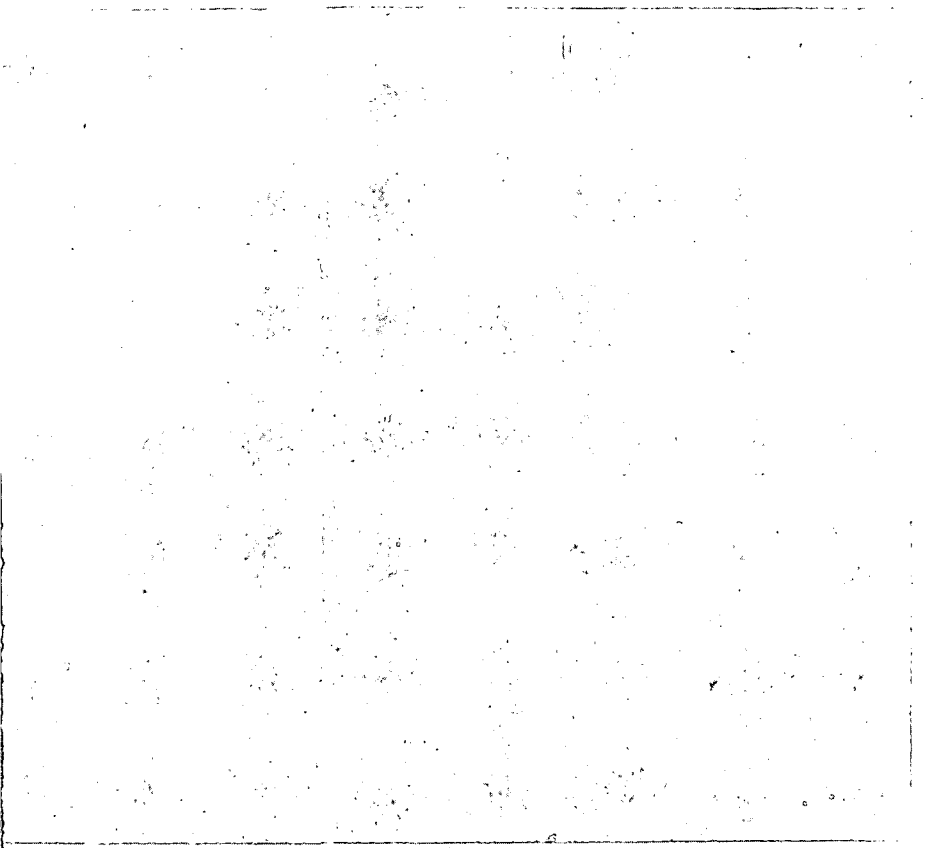

rope later on. As he twisted to do this, his hands trembled. He forced his breath to come steadily. He looked ahead to the steep, slanting roof of the tower.

The limb was already almost level. If he crawled further, it would sag under him. He would be climbing head down. He glanced back, and his heart began to pound. To go back, he would have to inch backwards along the narrow limb.

Cullen's words came to him: "When things get tight, *hold your mind on what to do next*. Do that. *Then* think of the next step."

HE inched ahead. The limb began to sag.

There was a rustling of leaves.

The limb swayed. It fell, and rose, beneath him.

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He clung to it, breathing hard.

He inched further. The leaves rustled. The limb pressed up, then fell away. He shut his eyes, his forehead tight against the bark, and crept ahead. After a time, he seemed to feel himself tip to one side. His eyes opened.

The tower was almost beneath him.

With his left arm, he clung tightly to the limb. With his right, he felt carefully for the rope tied to his belt. He worked one end of the rope forward and carefully looped it around the limb. He tied the knot that he had practiced over and over, then tested it, and felt it hold.

A breeze stirred the leaves. The limb began to sway.

The dark lawn below seemed to reach up and he felt himself already falling. He clung hard to the limb and felt his body tremble all over. Then he knew he had to go through the rest of his plan without hesitation, lest he lose his nerve completely.

He sucked in a deep breath, swung over the limb, let go with one hand, caught the rope, then caught it with the other hand, looped the rope around one ankle, and started to slide down.

The rope swung. The limb dipped, then lifted. The tree seemed to sway slightly.

Jim clung, his left foot clamping the loop of the rope passed over his right ankle. The swaying, dipping, and whirling began to die down. His hands felt weak and tired.

He slid gradually down the rope. Then the shutter was right beside him. He reached out, put his hand through the break in the slats, and lifted the iron catch. The hinges of the shutters screeched as he pulled them open.

A dead black oblong hung before him.

He reached out, and felt no sash in the opening. He climbed higher on the rope, pushed away from the building, and as he swung back, stepped across, caught the frame, and dropped inside.

The shutters screeched as he pulled them shut, but the house remained quiet. He stood still for a long moment, then unsnapped a case on his belt, and took out a little polarizing flashlight. He carefully thumbed the stud that turned the front lens. A dim beam faintly lit the room.

There was a glint of metal, then another. Shiny parallel lines ran from the ceiling to floor in front of him. There was an odd faint odor.

The house was quiet. A shift of the wind brought the distant sound of recorded music.

CAREFULLY, Jim eased the stud of the flashlight further around, so the light grew a trifle brighter.

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The vertical lines looked like bars.

He stepped forward and peered into the darkness.

Behind the bars, something stirred.

Jim reached back, unbuttoned the flap of his hip pocket and gripped the cool metal of his gun.

Something moved behind the bars. It reached out, bunched itself, reached out. Something large and dark slid up the bars.

Jim raised the gun.

A hissing voice said quietly, "You are from some sort of law-enforcement agency? Good."

Jim slid his thumb toward the stub of the light, so he could see more clearly. But the faint hissing voice went on, "Don't. It will do no good to see me."

Jim's hand tightened on the gun at the same instant that his mind asked a question.

The voice said, "Who am I? Why am I here? If I tell you, it will strain your mind to believe me. Let me show you."

The room seemed to pivot, then swung around him faster and faster. A voice spoke to him from all sides; then something lifted him up, and at an angle.

He stared at the dial, rapped it with his finger. The needle didn't move from its pin. He glanced at the blue-green planet on the screen. Photon pressure was zero, and there was nothing to do but try to land on chemical rockets. As he strapped himself into the acceleration chair, he began to really appreciate the size of his bad luck.

Any solo space pilot, he told himself, should be a good mechanic. And an individual planetary explorer should be his own pilot, to save funds. Moreover, anyone planning to explore Ludt VI, with its high gravity and pressure, and its terrific psychic stress, should be strong and healthy.

These requirements made Ludt VI almost the exclusive preserve of big organizations with teams of specialists. They sent out heavily equipped expeditions, caught a reasonable quota of spat, trained them on the way home, and sold the hideous creatures at magnificent prices to the proprietors of every dream parlor in the system. From this huge income, they paid their slightly less huge costs, and made a safe moderate profit on their investment. With a small expedition, it was different.

A small expedition faced risk, and a one-man expedition was riskiest of all. But if it succeeded, the trained spat brought the same huge price, and there were no big-ship bills for fuel, specialists, power equipment, and insurance. This, he thought, had almost been a successful trip. There were three nearly trained spat back in his sleeping compartment.

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But, though he was a competent trainer, a skilled explorer, a passable pilot, and in good physical condition, he was no mechanic. He didn't know how to fix what had gone wrong.

He sat back and watched the rim of the world below swing up in the deep blue sky.

THERE was a gray fuzziness. Jim was standing in the dark, seeing the bars shining faintly before him.

The black knot still clung to the bars.

Somewhere in the old mansion, a phone began to ring.

Jim said, in a low voice, "You were the pilot?"

"No. I was the spat. The others died in the crash. Some of your race found me and we made a — an agreement. But it has worked out differently here than I expected. The experiences I stimulate in your minds are enjoyable to you and to me. Yet either the structure of your brains is different from that of the pilot, or you lack training in mind control. You cannot wipe away these experiences afterward, and though I can do it for you easily, it is only temporary."

A door opened and shut downstairs. There was a sound of feet on the staircase.

The hissing began again. "You must go and bring help."

Jim thought of the rope and the trees. His hand tightened on the gun and he made no move toward the window.

The hissing sound said, "I see your difficulty. I will help you."

There was the crack of a rifle, then several shots outside. Jim swung the shutter open, felt a faint dizziness, and looked down on a warm sunlit lawn some three feet below.

A hissing voice said, "Take hold the rope. Now carefully step out. Loop the rope with your foot."

Somewhere in Jim's mind, as he did this, there was an uneasiness. He wondered at it as he climbed up the rope to the bar overhead, swung up onto the bar, slipped and nearly lost his grip. He could see the bar was steady and solid, and he wondered as it seemed to move under him. The green lawn was such a short distance down that there clearly was little danger, and he wondered why his breath came fast as he swung around on the bar, slid down to a sort of resting place where he put on climbing irons before starting down again. Always on the way down, the whistling voice told him that it was just a few feet more, just a few feet, as bit by bit he made his way down, and suddenly heard shots, shouts, and a repeated scream.

Jim stepped off onto the soft lawn, stumbled, and knelt to take off the climbing irons. His heart pounded like a trip-hammer. He

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realized there was a blaze of spotlights around him. He saw lights coming on in the mansion, and memory returned in a rush. He drew in a deep shaky breath, glanced at the tree, then saw a little knot of people near the base of the tower. He walked over, recognized Walters in the glow of the lights and saw a still figure on the ground.

Walters said, "I shouldn't have let him try it. Cover his face, Cullen."

Cullen bent to draw a coat up over the head of the motionless figure, which was twisted sidewise.

Jim looked down.

He saw his own face.

HE was aware of darkness and of something hard beneath him. Voices came muffled from somewhere nearby. He heard the sound of a phone set in its cradle, the slam of a door, the scrape of glass on glass. He breathed and recognized a choking smell of cigar smoke.

Jim sat up.

Nearby was the model of the mansion. Jim swung carefully to his feet, made his way across the room, and opened the door to the next office. He blinked in the bright light, then saw Walters look up and grin. "One more night like this and I retire. How do you feel?"

"I ache all over and I'm dizzy. How did I get here?"

"I was afraid your going in there might misfire and touch off their escape, so I had the place surrounded. We saw you go in, there was about a five-minute pause, and the shutters seemed to come open. A figure came out. Then there was the crack of a rifle from the dormer window of a house across the street. I sent some men into that house, and the rest of us closed in on the mansion. We used the spotlights on our cars to light the place. We'd just found what we thought was your body — with a broken neck — when there was a thud behind us. There you were, and the other body was gone.

"Right then, I thought it was going to be the same as usual. But this time we nailed several men and women in quite a state of confusion. Some of them have fingerprints that match those from the first place we raided. We don't have the equipment yet, because that tower staircase was boarded up tight . . . What's wrong?"

Jim told his own version, adding, "Since that shot came *before* I opened the shutters, the 'figure' you saw go up the rope must have been an illusion, to fool whoever had the gun across the street. And since I heard someone running up the stairs a few minutes before you came in, I don't see how the stairs can be boarded up."

Walters sat up straight. "*Another* illusion!"

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Jim said, "It would be nice to know if there's any limit to those illusions."

Walters said, "This afternoon, we tried looking at those shutters through field glasses. Beyond about four hundred feet, you could see the broken slats. So there's a limit. But if there's no equipment, this is uncanny, 'spat' or no 'spat.'"

Jim shook his head. "I don't know. You can use the same electromagnetic laws and similar components to make all kinds of devices—radios, television sets, electronic computers. What you make depends mainly on how you put the parts together. It may be that in the different conditions on some other planet, types of nerve components similar to those we use for thought might be used to create dangerous illusions in the minds of other creatures."

"That still leaves us with a problem. What do we do with this thing?"

"I got the impression it was like a merchant who has to sell his wares to live. Let me go back and see if we can make an agreement with it."

"I'll go with you."

Jim shook his head. "One of us has to stay beyond that four-hundred-foot limit."

THE stairs were narrow leading up into the tower. Jim found weary men amidst plaster and bits of board at a solid barricade on the staircase. He scowled at it, then shouted up the stairs, "I want to talk to you!"

There was a sort of twist in the fabric of things. Jim found himself staring at the wall beside the stairs, its plaster gone and bits of board torn loose. The staircase itself was open. He started up.

Behind him, a man still staring at the wall said, "Did you see that? He went *around* somehow."

The back of Jim's neck prickled. He reached a tall door, opened it, turned, and he was standing where he had been before.

There was a faint hissing. "I am glad you came back. I can't keep this up forever."

"We want to make an agreement with you. Otherwise, we'll have to use force."

"There is no need of that. I ask only food, water, and a chance to use my faculties. And I would be very happy if the atmospheric pressure around me could be increased. Falling pressure tires me so that it is hard for me to keep self-control."

Jim thought of the first night, when there had been the appearance of light on mansion and grounds, but heavy clouds and only a thin moon in the sky.

The hissing voice said, "It had stormed, with a sharp fall in atmospheric pressure. I was exhausted and created a wrong illu-

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sion. Can you provide what I need?"

"The food, water, and pressure chamber, yes. I don't know about the opportunity to 'use your faculties.'"

"There is a painting in the world now that wasn't there before. You and I did that."

"What are you driving at?"

"I can't increase skill where there has been no practice, no earnest thought or desire. I can't help combine facts or memories where none have been stored. But within these limits I can help you and others to a degree of concentration few men of your world know."

"Could you teach us to concentrate this way on our own?"

"I don't know. We would have to try it. Meanwhile, I have been here long enough to have learned that your race has used horses to extend their powers of movement, dogs to increase their ability to trail by scent, cows and goats to convert indigestible grass and leaves into foodstuffs. These all were your partners in the physical world. It seems to me that I am much the same, but in the mental world."

Jim hesitated. "Meanwhile, you can help us to forget these dream lives?"

"Easily. But, as I say, the effect is not permanent."

Jim nodded. "I'll see what we can do."

He went to tell Walters, who listened closely, then picked up the phone.

EARLY the next morning, Jim climbed the steps to the high narrow door of the tower, put on dark glasses and went in. Right behind him came a corporal with a creepie-peepie TV transmitter. From outside came the windmill roar of helicopters, and, high up, the rumble of jets.

The corporal opened the shutter and spoke quietly into the microphone. A hissing voice spoke in Jim's mind. "I am ready."

Jim said, "This entire place is being watched by television. If there is any important difference between what observers here report and what the cameras show, this place and everything in it will be destroyed a few seconds later."

"I understand," said the hissing voice. Then it told him how to loosen one of the bars, and Jim loosened it and stood back.

There was the sound of footsteps on the staircase. A large heavy box with one end hinged and open was thrust in the doorway.

On the floor, something bunched and unbunched, and moved past into the box. Jim closed the box and snapped shut the padlock. Men lifted it and started down the staircase. Jim and the corporal followed. As they went out the front

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door, heavy planks were thrown across to a waiting truck. Sweating men in khaki carried the box up the planks into the truck. Then the rear doors swung shut, the engine roared, and the truck moved away.

Jim thought of the truck's destination, a pressure tank in a concrete blockhouse under a big steel shed out in the desert.

He looked around and saw Walters, who smiled at him and held out a slim envelope. "Good work," said Walters. "And I imagine some hundreds of ex-addicts reclaimed from mental hospitals are going to echo those sentiments."

Jim thanked him, and Walters led him to the car, saying, "Now what you need is sleep, and plenty of it."

"And how!"

Once home, Jim fell into an exhausted sleep, and had a nightmare. In the nightmare, he dreamed that he woke up, and found himself in a bed in a room where a light curtain blew in at the window, and the morning sun shone brightly in.

He sat up, and looked around carefully at the furniture, and felt the solid wall of the room as he asked himself a question that he knew would bother him again.

Which was the nightmare?

Then he remembered his fear as he climbed the tree, and Cullen's advice: "When things get tight, *hold your mind on what to do next*. Do that. *Then* think of the next step."

He thought a moment, then lay back and smiled. He might not be absolutely certain this was real. But even if it wasn't, he felt sure he would win in the end.

No nightmare could last forever.

— CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

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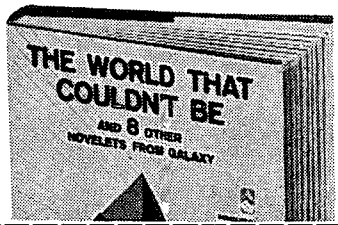

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A HUSBAND

I admit it — he beat my time. But my day

By WILLIAM W. STUART

SOON, very soon now, the time will come for me to meet my wife's husband. I can hardly wait. Every dog has his day and Professor Thurlow Benjamin has just about had it. Every day has its dog, too, and I am going to return to him with full five years' interest the bad time he gave to me. The dog.

Dog? Look, he stole my girl not once but twice. The second time he, you might say, took his time to beat my time — and left me behind to the bad time that belonged to him. Benji is — or he was and he will be — a scientifically sneaky, two-timing dog, and a dog's life is what he gave me. But now, after nearly five years, time is on my side. He will get what, minute by minute, is coming to him not soon enough, but soon.

Benji — Professor Thurlow Benjamin — was my oldest, closest friend. I was his. We hated each other dearly in the way that only two boyhood pals can and by chance or mischance that quality of bitter-friendly, boyish rivalry never left our relationship. Why? A woman, naturally.

The first time we met, he was a tall, gangling, red-headed, big-nosed kid of nine. I, Bull (for Boulard) Benton, was shorter, stockier, heavier. Maybe not handsome exactly, but clean cut, very clean cut. Benji knocked a chip off my shoulder and I knocked his block off, but not without collecting a few lumps doing it. From then on, we fought together against anyone else. When no one else was handy, we fought each other. And naturally we each wanted what the other had.

After high school, we roomed together at Burnington Univer-

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FOR MY WIFE

is coming. Any minute now time is about to run out on him!

Illustrated by BURNS

sity right there in our home town, Belt City. Benji was a brain, a scholar. I was an athlete. So he broke nearly every bone in his body trying to be a six-foot-three, one - hundred - and - thirty - nine-pound scatback, while I nearly sprained a brain that was deep, definitely deep, but maybe not quite as quick on its feet as some, trying for scholarship.

The last year and a half at the university, the competition between us narrowed down to a battle for Vera Milston, old Dean Milston's statuesque daughter. That was all a mistake. I can see it now. So can Benji. But not then.

DEAN Milston was the dourest, sourest, meanest old tyrant ever to suspend a football captain for a couple of unimportant "D"s. One afternoon in junior year at basketball practice — Benji was out, dragging around a cast — Jocko Bunter bet me ten I didn't have the nerve to date the dean's daughter. Well, hell, I'd seen her around, visiting the dean as regularly as I had to. She was a lot of girl. Tall, honey-blonde — a little on the regal, commanding side, and maybe her lips were a mite set over a chin that the old man should have kept to himself — but there are times when a young man doesn't analyze the details as carefully as he might. She was built like nothing I had tackled all fall.

So I took a chance, got a date, won ten, and that might and should have been that. She had a way of saying "No!" that made me think of her father. But, the thing was, Benji didn't know about the bet. I dated her once. So he had to date her twice. Again, I didn't analyze. I jumped to the conclusion Benji had the

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hots for her and went to work to cut him out.

That kept us busy the next year and a half and I led all the way. Vera and I got engaged at the spring prom to be married right after my graduation — which improved the odds on my graduating considerably. The dean was a grim old devil who considered Hamlet a comedy and could refuse anything to anyone — except Vera, and how could I have known it was fear rather than affection that made him give in to her?

Anyway, perhaps the strain of passing me a diploma was too great. The next day the old devil passed on himself, and no matter where he may be sitting, I know he is happy as long as he can watch the others fry. But I shouldn't grumble. He saved me, unintentional though it was.

Vera, possibly having second thoughts as she looked over the Dean's List, said she couldn't marry me till after a reasonable period of mourning. The Army took me and rejected Benji. He stayed on for post-graduate study in physics. I told you he was a brain.

A brain, but not equally acute in all fields. When I got back to Belt City three years later, Benji was already an assistant professor of physics—and Vera's husband. They were settled in the old dean's big, ancient house just off the campus and Benji was aiming — or being aimed — at a distinguished academic career. I came back to town with the idea of winding up the family insurance and real estate business and pulling out, mostly to keep away from them.

It wasn't, you understand, that I was carrying such a heavy torch for Vera. She hadn't blighted my life; not then, that is. But it seemed to me that living in town with her and Professor Thurlow Benjamin — a gloating, triumphant Benji, laughing at me because he'd succeeded in marrying my girl — would be a real annoyance. But, of course, when I hit town I had to call them and they had to invite me to dinner.

For one time, anyway, I figured I had to accept. I gritted my teeth and went. I never had a sweeter, more enjoyable evening in all my life.

I GOT there about seven in the evening and walked up the steps to the big old porch on the dean's house feeling a bit nervous and upset. I'd walked up those same steps often enough before, feeling nervous and upset, but this was different. I lifted the oversized brass knocker and rapped. Vera's voice, coming from the back of the house someplace, cut through the evening air.

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"Thurlow! Answer the door!"

"Yes, sweets. I'm on my way, Vera hun bun." That was Benji. Hun bun, yet! And his voice was misery. It cringed and whined. I grinned to myself and began to feel more cheerful.

Benji let me in. His glasses were thicker and his hair thinner and he looked a lot older. But it was Benji, the same old lanky, gangling redhead; yet not the same, too. He had a hang-dog look that was new and suddenly I felt so good, I punched him playfully in the ribs. He winced — and didn't even counter. If the fight hadn't gone out of him, it had sure been watered down. We went on in to the parlor across the hall from the dean's old study. Vera joined us. She didn't look bad — at a glance. But if you checked right close, and I did, there was something in her look — a sharpness I hadn't noticed before; her nose seemed bigger, beak-like; the broad, solid shoulders; deep-down grooves at the corners of her mouth.

She threw her arms around me and kissed me. My temperature stayed steady and cool.

"Boulard! Boulard, darling! You look marvelous!"

I felt great, too. "Vera, girl. You're as gorgeous as ever, radiant, blooming, still the campus goddess. And Mrs. Thurlow Benjamin now, hm-m? Old Benji is sure a lucky dog."

Benji forced a hollow laugh. Vera smiled a positive agreement.

Then Benji sort of coughed out a faint note of hope and pleaded, "Vera, sweet, this is a — uh — an occasion, don't you agree, dear? Don't you — ah — do you think maybe I ought to — fix us all a drink?"

"Thurlow! You drink far too much! You had a highball before dinner at Professor Dorman's only night before last."

Almost — but not quite — I felt sorry for him.

"Ah, well, Vera doll," I said, "this *is* an occasion, after all. And I *do* want to drink a toast to you and Benji."

"Hmph."

"Especially you, the love of my life, lost now, but lovelier than ever."

"Boulard! . . . Well, Thurlow, don't stand there like an idiot. Go mix us some drinks. And mind the line on the bottle."

And then she turned back with some more gush for me. I enjoyed it, knowing now what I had been saved from. In fact, as I said, I enjoyed the whole evening; my playing up to Vera made her just that much rougher on Benji. Revenge on Benji plus relief at what I had escaped made life seem pleasant, and right there and then I changed my

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mind about leaving town. I decided to stay and settled down.

WELL, I did settle, but not too far down. Instead of selling out Uncle George's insurance and real estate firm, I went to work in it. It was prosperous enough and light work. There were plenty of girls around town if you got around, and I did.

Looking back, those were the happy years. Naturally I kept seeing quite a bit of Vera and Benji. Rubbing it in? Sure, why not? Hell, half the pleasure in any success comes from giving a hard time to those who gave you a hard time. It may not be nice, but it is normal.

I lolled in the shade and laughed; Benji sweated and suffered. His boss's whip cracked merrily. He plodded ahead in the University Physics Department and fiddled around his lab whenever he could escape into it.

Then there came a black Friday evening in early autumn. I was due at Benji's for dinner, just him and me. Vera had gone up to Chicago that morning to see her ever-dying Aunt Bella and do some shopping. She would not be back till the next day so she called on me to keep an eye on Benji.

So I was due for a quietly pleasant early evening listening to Benji talk about his sorrows. Then, I figured, Benji would go to his lab in the old dean's study and I would go out on the town. I had a date, one of the very best, Starlight Glowe, formerly Daisy Hanzel, formerly an office clerk. She was a pert little strawberry blonde, cute, with a lot of good humor and a lot of everything else too; about as unlike Vera as a girl could be. That week she was between nightclub engagements, back in her old home town. And back in the old groove with me, too. I looked forward to the evening — first Benji's troubles and then my own pleasures.

I pulled up in front of Benji's old place just at dusk. A late working lineman from Beltsville Power was fiddling around on the pole outside Benji's lab room. "Hey, Mac," he hollered, "you going in there? Look, tell the prof they'll cut it in at seven ayem, huh? Can't make it a minute sooner."

I nodded as I went up the steps and across the porch; knocked once. Walked on in — and stopped dead in the hallway to stare up the stairs. It was Benji, but not the Vera's Benji I was used to. He was dressed in the evening clothes Vera got him to wear only at major faculty functions. He carried a cane,

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wore a flower. Tonight he was Benji, man about town, knight of the evening. Sharp. Cool. Cocky.

He strutted on down the stairs and past me. He winked, grinned that dirty, sneaky grin of his I remembered all too well from the old days. At the door, he looked back over his shoulder, still grinning, and said, "Stick around a minute, Bull boy. I have something to show you." The door slammed shut.

I couldn't believe it; he wouldn't dare. Then I heard my car, my new sport car, starting outside and I swore, grabbing the doorknob.

"Wait, Bull. You couldn't catch me."

I spun around. Damned if it wasn't old Benji, coming down the stairs again just as though it wasn't impossible. This time he looked himself, but worse. He had on an old lab smock and a new hangover. He looked awful — but with a hint of satisfaction too, like remembering the time he'd had getting into such lousy shape.

"Well, Bull boy," he mumbled, wavering on down the steps, holding the top of his head on with one hand, "come on out in the lab. Maybe we could find a little nip. And I have something to show you."

"So you said."

"Eh? Oh, yes, so I did. Last night, when I was going out."

"It was just now — only you went out all dressed up, and here you are all beat up. What's this all about?"

"Come *on*," he said with a flash of temper. "When I get a hair or two of the dog, I'll explain it to you."

I followed him into his lab, the dean's old study. It was the only thing Benji could call his own. Vera let him have it on the off-chance that he might find something important enough to give their social and financial position a boost.

In the lab, Benji fished an amber-filled flask from the wastebasket under the old rolltop desk and poured himself a double, me a single, in a couple of big test tubes. I only half saw him out of a corner of the eye.

What I was really looking at was a damned peculiar rig that filled up about a third of the space along the side wall next to the kitchen. It was — I couldn't figure it. It looked something like one of those jungle gym outfits in the kids' playgrounds. But there were wires running from it to half a dozen wall plugs, and a seat up in the middle with a bunch of dials and things.

It was all odd, and oddest was the way it all sort of shim-

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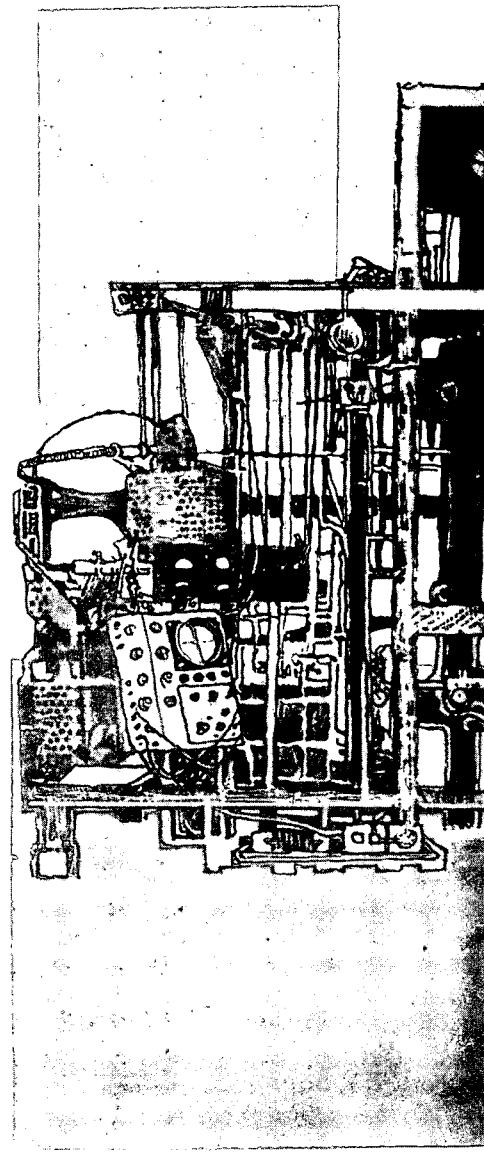
mered and blurred as I watched it.

"What in hell is that?" I walked across the lab toward it, reaching out.

"Better not touch it, Bull. You might knock something out."

Since he put it like that, I raised my hand to grab hold of one of the cross bars by the seat in the center of the thing — and there I was resting comfortably on a small cloud in far outer space, watching a great spiral nebula whirling in infinite majesty through the vast, empty blackness, and I thought about the mystery of the universe. I felt that if I could just reach out, I would have in my grasp the final answer. But then it drifted away and the nebula slowly narrowed and evolved into a great system of suns, planets, moons — and finally into the big, old chandelier in the dean's study.



WHEN it all seemed to stabilize at that point, I sat up a little shakily. The room, Benji's lab now, was still there. I stood up and felt lousy. My head ached. I looked around. Benji was sitting at the desk slumped over, his head on his folded arms. The flask of whiskey, half gone, was on the desk beside him. I emptied it out a little more, into me, and checked my watch. Six o'clock and the

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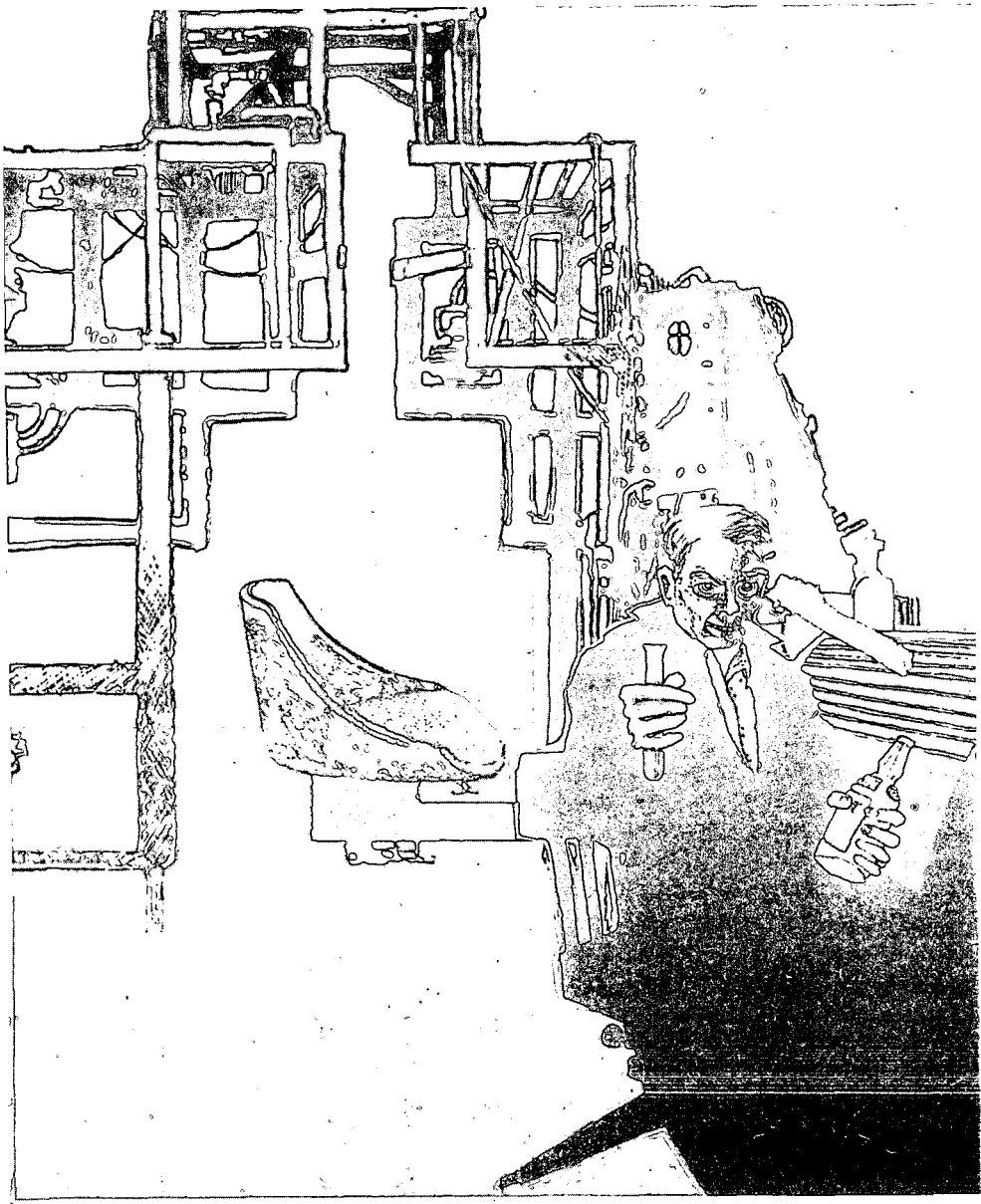

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sky showed gray outside. I had been out all night.

I put my foot on the base of Benji's swivel chair and shoved hard. The chair rolled back, out from under him. He slumped down with a pleasing thud on the floor. He woke up with a pained expression that helped my headache a little.

"Damn you, Benji," I said, "you did that out of spite, to break my date with Daisy, I bet."

He yawned. "I told you you'd better not touch it."

"Because you knew then I'd have to go ahead and do it. It's a wonder, with me knocked out, you didn't go try to steal my girl."

"I did. I am."

"You what?"

"I did go out with Daisy. I am with her now."

"Are you cracked? You are right here with me."

"True, but I am simultaneously with Daisy." He grinned reflectively. "And I don't mind saying Daisy is much better company than you . . . Now wait, Bull. I know this is difficult for you to grasp, but it is a fact that I am in two places at the same time — only on different circuits. This is big, Bull, really big! After you help me with one or two details, I am going to share it with you. Listen to me."

Sometimes I can be sickeningly gullible. "All right. Start explaining."

"Think, Bull! Last night you saw me go out the front door. At substantially the same time, you also saw me, dressed quite differently, come down the hall stairs. It should be obvious. I have built a time machine."

I looked down at my watch and then back at him, with raised eyebrows.

"No, Bull. Not a machine for telling time; a machine for traveling through time or, actually, more or less around it. You see my machine there."

The jungle gym rig was still at the side of the room, blurred and shimmering. "Yeah, I see it. And don't bother telling me not to touch it again. I won't."

"Your own fault. Ordinarily you could touch even one of the bars; it is perfectly safe. But just now the machine is there twice. That creates further static force fields."

"Benji —"

"Look at it. Looks as though you were seeing double, hm-m? And you are. You see, Bull, this coming morning at ten to seven, I took — and will take — the machine and I traveled back to ten to five yesterday afternoon. At that time the machine was already there. Actually, I should have moved it just before I used it this morning, to limit the over-

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laps. But I was rushed. You'll see. Daisy and I will be here shortly." He grinned. It was an expression I had never particularly cared for. "Have another drink, Bull."

That was an expression I liked better. I did have one. His story was unbelievable. But I was beginning to believe it — partly because of the machine there and the fact that I had seen two of him practically at once the evening before, partly because I knew Benji would be capable of almost anything if it would let him steal a girl from me and get away from Vera besides.

HE took a short nip himself and went on. "I won't strain your limited facilities by trying to give you the technical side of it. More or less, it is a matter of setting up the proper number of counteracting magnetic force fields, properly focused, in a proper relationship each with the other to bend the normal space factors in such a way as to circumvent time. Is that clear?"

"Not to me," I said. "Is it to you?"

"Not altogether. But what is clear is this. My machine works. I can jump through time. To any time."

"Got any special messages from Cleopatra?"

"The amount or period of time is a question of power. With only the regular house current I have connected now, about a day at a step is the limit. That is as far as I have gone. Of course I could go one day and then another and then another, forward or back, indefinitely. With more current, there would be no such limitations."

"How about taking a run up to the end of the week and let me know how the World Series is going to come out?"

"Ah, now you begin to see! I told you this is a big thing — tremendous! And all I ask is just a little help from you, and you will share in the proceeds."

"What, me help? How?"

"I had the power company run in a special power line yesterday. It will cut in this morning at seven. With this added power, the machine can travel five years. Five years at a jump, which as far as I — we, that is — want to go."

"Well, just suppose what you say is true, Benji. If it is, then you used your sneaky machine to two-time me with Daisy last night, eh? I like that. Vera will like that, too. But you expect to bribe me with a share in your rig to help you out. How? With what?"

"Bull, it's like this. I did go out last night, my first time in a long time. You know Vera. So, considering the past few years,

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you can understand that I was — uh — maybe a bit reckless last night, ran into a few little problems. Nothing serious, of course. And besides, with your help, the police won't be able —"

"The police?"

"Yes. But, Bull, you've been right here with me all night. You can swear to that. So I couldn't possibly have driven your car up the steps and through the glass doors into the ancient history section of the museum."

"My car!"

"Now, Bull, we'll make money — you can get *lots* of cars. And I didn't mean to smash up yours. I simply wanted to give Daisy a rough idea of a time trip back into the past. But you can tell the police I was right here when someone broke out through the window by the Neanderthal exhibit while the police were coming in the front door after us. So someone else must have driven off in the police car."

"You stole the police car?" I yelped.

"OH, we won't keep it," he said airily. "But perhaps they are upset about our borrowing it and about the duet of 'As Time Goes By' that Daisy and I sang over the police radio."

"Lord! And when did you finish all this fun and games?" I demanded.

"When? Let's see. It's 6:40A.M. So we — Daisy and I — are on our way back here now. In the patrol car."

"Now? You and Daisy? In the patrol car?"

"The one we borrowed. The police — they seem to have a lot of cars — are not far behind. I believe they think they recognized me. You can tell them how wrong they are."

He stopped to listen. I heard it too, a sound of sirens in the distance, coming closer.

"So, Benji. In a minute or so, you — a second edition of you, when one has always been plenty — you are coming here, with all the cops in town on your tail, *and* with my girl. And you expect me to step forward and, lying in my teeth, tell these enraged cops that you are innocent. This is quite a request, Benji."

There was the roar of a car racing down the quiet, Saturday-dawn street. Benji looked at me anxiously. "Here we come. Bull, please! You wouldn't turn me over to the police. Would you?"

No, I didn't want the cops to get him. I wanted to get him myself — and let Vera finish him.

There was a sound of running footsteps up the porch stairs. The hallway door opened. Arm in arm, laughing like a pair of idiots, in came Benji — Benji II — and

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my girl, Daisy. They staggered across the room. Benji II threw his arms around Daisy and kissed her with conviction and assurance. Then, quickly, he stepped away from her and walked over to the time-machine rig.

"Hurry it up," said the first Benji, "quick. The power will cut off any second now, until they switch in the new line."

Drunk or not, Benji II knew what he was doing. He dragged the straight chair by the wall to the side of the machine and climbed it. He swayed, almost fell. Then, without touching any of the bars, he managed to step from the chair into the seat of the machine rig. He fiddled with a dial or knob — and vanished. The double exposure look of the machine disappeared too.

"Benji," said Daisy, staring blankly at the machine.

"Daisy," said the leftover Benji, walking toward her. The sound of sirens outside sounded loud and louder — and then moaned to a stop in front of the house.

"Benji," Daisy said again, giving me and the sirens about as much attention as an individual ant gets at a family picnic, "Benji, it was *true* then! All that you were telling me about going through time was true! And we can —"

"Of course, sweet. I told you I'd be with you, that everything will be all right, with good old Bull to help us. What time have you, Bull?"

"Hah?" I was dazed.

"The time? What time is it?"

"It's just about seven. But —"

Heavy footsteps pounded up the front stairs and across the porch. The front door knocker thundered.

"Bull," said Benji, "Bull, old friend. I think there may be someone at the door. Would you see who it is?"

I don't know why I didn't make him go answer. I still don't know. But I walked out into the hall from the lab and opened the front door — and nearly got trampled by a squad of four cops, headed by big, tough Sergeant Winesap. There were, I saw through the open door, two squad cars parked out front and another coming down the block, just behind a taxi.

"Oh," said Winesap, "it's you, Benton. Say, you weren't in this crime wave, too, were you? We only saw two, that madman friend of yours, Professor Benjamin, and the girl, in your car . . . Look, you know what they did? They knocked off three hydrants whooping about time and the fountain of youth, and wrecked the museum, and the police car — and what they did to Officer Durlin . . . Maybe you weren't

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in on it, Benton, but we know they came in here. Friend or no friend, don't try to obstruct justice. Where are they?"

"Yes, officer?" inquired Benji, bland as could be, from the lab door. "What seems to be the trouble? Did you wish to see me?"

His manner must have been disarming. At least they didn't shoot him on the spot. They just advanced, loosening guns in holsters, like a thoughtful lynching party. Benji strolled back into the lab and over to Daisy, who was standing by the machine at the side of the room.

The officers were confused. Benji, sober or nearly so, in his old lab smock, looked a good deal different to them from the wild man they'd been chasing all over town. But there was Daisy in her evening gown.

"That's them, all right," said a young rookie with a fine-blooming shiner. "She's the one that threw the eggplants. I'd know her anywhere."

"And that's Benjamin," said Winesap, grimly. "Okay, both of you, don't try to run. Come along and no more nonsense."

Benji held up one hand — and slipped the other arm around Daisy's waist. "Gentlemen, please! I have no idea what this is about. But surely it can have nothing to do with me. Mr. Benton and I have been right here in my laboratory all night, working. He can verify that."

They looked at me. I opened my mouth. I didn't say a word.

Vera did. She stood there in the doorway. It must have been her in the cab, coming back bright and early from Chicago. She took in the whole scene. Benji. Daisy. Police. Me.

"Benji!!!" she said. You couldn't imagine what she put into that one word.

Everyone turned then to look at her. Slowly and with infinite menace, she started across the room.

"Now, dear," said Benji nervously, "now, sweet, take it easy. This is only a little experiment. Not what you are thinking at all."

We swung back toward Benji. He had boosted Daisy onto the seat of his time rig and swung up beside her. Vera yelled and started to run toward them.

Benji twisted a knob and grinned. "Good-by now," he said. And they were gone.

Benji was gone again. Daisy was gone. The whole rig was gone.

VERA, looking a little forlorn and foolish, ended up her dash stumbling into the empty space where the thing had been. I expect we all looked a little

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foolish, standing there, gaping. But I had to carry foolishness to the ultimate of idiocy.

Vera at that single moment seemed sort of sad and helpless. And, Lord knows, I was mixed up. I walked over and put an arm around Vera, saying, "There, there, Vera, hon. It's all right. I'm here."

I should never have called her attention to it. There I was — and, the hell of it was I had kept playing up to her all this time just to needle Benji. When, that morning, I put my arm around her, I never had a chance.

I was married. To Vera. I still am. It has been a long, long time. Almost five years by the calendar, centuries by subjective time.

I am Vera's husband, sitting by the light of a kerosene lamp in Dean Milston's old study, which had been Benji's lab, writing. Benji and Daisy got away and I got caught. But now I can smile about it. Now, after nearly five years.

You understand?

With the power he got into his machine from the new power line, he said he could go just five years at a jump. Of course, away from Vera. Probably he figured on going further, that he would go the power limit of five years, stop, and then jump again, and again, far enough for complete safety.

But I have had a lot more time to figure than he did. I am figuring on a little party; a little reception in honor of our first intrepid time traveler. A surprise party.

It will be five years to the hour since Daisy and Benji left. Benji will be the surprise, since only I know that he will pop up in our midst. It will surprise Benji. It will surprise Vera — and our guests, among whom I have included Sergeant (Captain now) Winesap and the others of his squad.

Eccentric, a party like that? I suppose. But, to Vera and the others, it is a breakfast anniversary party — the anniversary of the very moment of our engagement. Vera is flattered enough to be tolerant and even pleased at this romantic notion. And, since I know I have only one out and that it is coming, I am a dutiful — cringing and servile, that is — husband. So Vera indulges me in a harmless eccentricity or two.

My other little eccentricity is electric power — I don't favor it. I use Benji's lab, the old dean's study, as my den. I claim to be writing a historical novel. I need realism, atmosphere. I have had all electric power lines removed from that entire section of the house. There is no power. None.

That's why I'm writing by lamplight.

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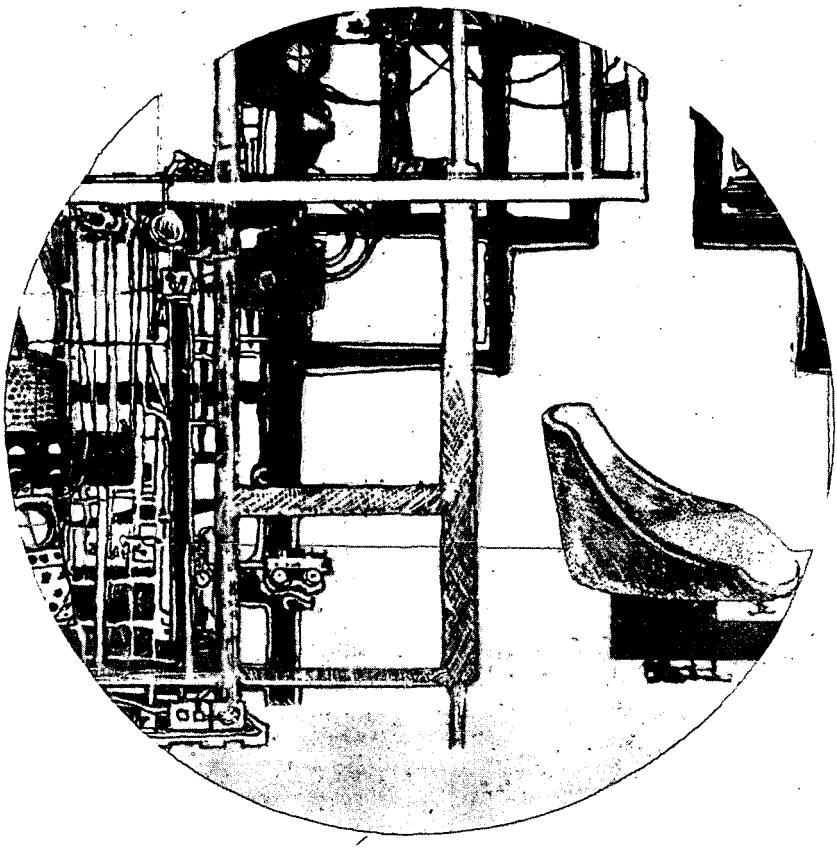
Our anniversary party will be here. The lamps and candles and the dawn of a bright new day will be light enough when, to the total astonishment of Vera and our guests, Benji and Daisy and the time rig suddenly appear among us. I will greet them with enthusiasm — but this will be as nothing to the greeting they will get from other sources. Benji will work his dials and controls, frantically. Nothing will happen. No power.

Vera will step forward. The hell with whether the statute of limitations may or may not have run out on Benji's assorted legal crimes and misdemeanors. The wrath of Vera accepts no limitations.

Benji will have run out of time and it will be my time then.

— WILLIAM W. STUART



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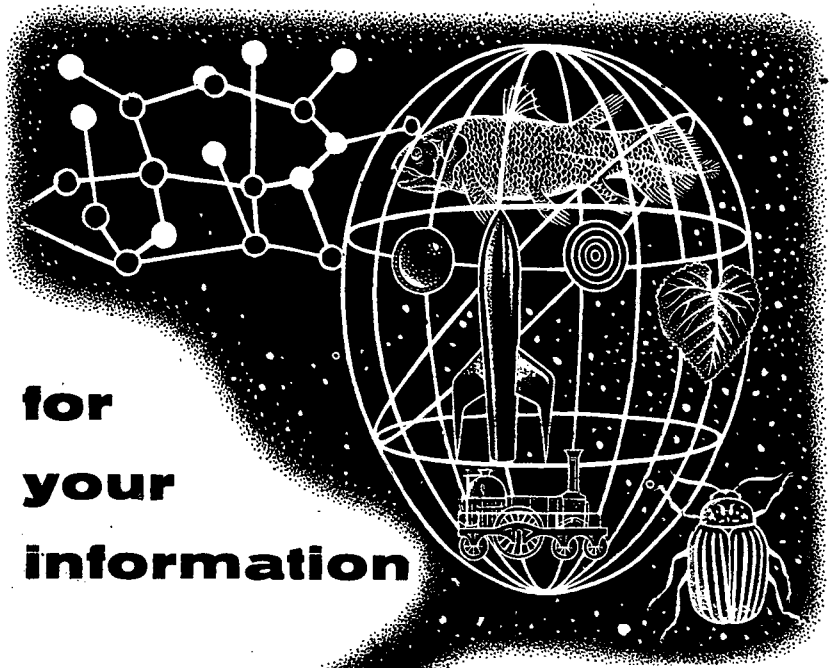

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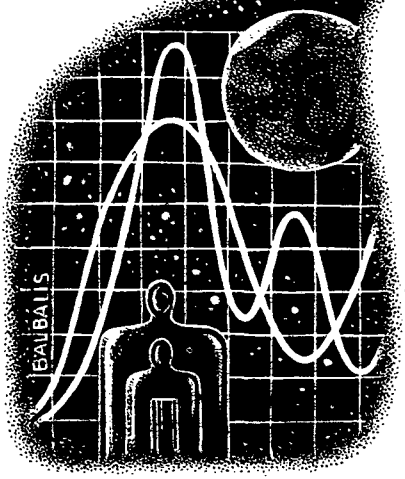
BY WILLY LEY



HOW TO SLAY DRAGONS

THE discussion I have in mind in writing this took place in Long Beach, California, and it happened to be in German. It also got nowhere, but the locality had nothing to do with this; the result would have been the same in Chicago, New Orleans, New York, London or West Berlin. The problem involved several unknowns and such discussions tend to get out of hand no matter when or where.

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That the conversation was in German is a little more to the point because my indubitably honorable but less than learned opponent kept quoting books written in that language and never translated, as far as I know.

There were four books he kept bringing up.

The first of them was Hanns Hörbiger's *World Ice Doctrine,* published in Germany about 1910. By way of explanation, I have to say that this 800 page quarto volume attempted to explain the origin of the Solar System, the nature of the Sun and geological history. Since this attempt was made long before anything definite about atomic energy became known, it misfired, of course. You can succeed in understanding the nature of a star to about the same extent if you don't know about nuclear physics as you can in building a jet plane of wood and bricks.

The second book was by one Dr. Edgar Dacqué, published about 1925, and was an attempt to turn evolution around. What Dacqué tried to show was that the "human line" was the central line of evolution; in other words, that all living creatures above the level of single-celled organisms had descended from Man.

The third one was a book on Atlantis of about 1900 vintage and the fourth one was Velikovsky's ridiculous *Worlds in Collision.*

WHAT these four authors had in common was that they laid an enormous stress on legends. Hanns Hörbiger had ransacked the world's store of legends to prove his own ideas. One of his pet ideas was that at one time recently (geologically speaking) a moon of Earth had collided with us. So he hauled out every legend dealing with fire in the sky, the Norse gods battling in the sky, Biblical references to stars falling from the sky, and so forth and so on.

Edgar Dacqué repeated the game; he added to Hörbiger's store of legends — in the meantime, ethnologists had written some twenty books or so about tribal legends in various corners of the Earth — and quoted a whole set of different legends, those that might be twisted into having a bearing on evolution and the past in general. (His main source was a large work by Ben Gurion. I often wondered what Ben Gurion himself thought about all this.)

The man who wrote the Atlantis book had also quoted a large number of "age-old" legends, some of which were not so "age-old" at all, having been taken from a novel by the Hungarian writer Maurus Jókai. And, of

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course, Velikovsky, whose book was full of the most surprising similarities to Hörbiger's work, also stressed heavily that what he said explained ancient legends and was, in turn, bolstered by them.

Our fruitless discussion revolved around the question of just how valuable a legend is, or can be. "You yourself," my opponent said, "have written in one of your books that African natives had a legend about the okapi. Then it was discovered." I pointed out that the natives did not have a "legend" about the okapi; they talked about it matter-of-factly. That some of the white explorers labeled the talk "legend" because they happened not to know the animal at the time was exclusively their fault.

"All right," said my opponent, "let's take an old legend then. Don't you think that the old legend of the dragon reflects a memory of the dinosaurs?"

I said no, I don't think so and that I have many reasons for not thinking that they do, the point being mostly that the dragon itself is a fairly late invention which cannot be traced back even as far as the time of Christ.

By that time my opponent, rather exasperated, asked the crucial question: "Don't you think that a legend has been caused by something?" He was probably surprised when I said yes, certainly a legend is caused by something, some event. But unless you can establish the facts by other means, you will never be able to reconstruct the original event from the later legend!

As an example, I offered the story of the *Lindwurmdenkmal* in Klagenfurt in Austria, which happened to be fresh on my mind. Just two days earlier, I had met a man who had seen this monument before the war and wanted to know if I had any information — whether it had survived the war intact, or damaged, or not at all.

TRYING to describe the *Lindwurmdenkmal* in detail would be a waste of time since I can offer an illustration, Fig. 1. I only have to add that *Lindwurm* is the Germanic equivalent of "dragon" and that *Denkmal* means "monument." The location is the central square of the city of Klagenfurt where it was placed with proper ceremonies on June 2, 1636. The monument consists of two figures, a club-swinging giant and the dragon. It does not seem to be known who sculpted the figure of the giant, but the dragon was carved from stone from the nearby Kreutzberg by the sculptor Ulrich Vogelsang in 1590.

Legend has it that the skull of the dragon was found in 1335

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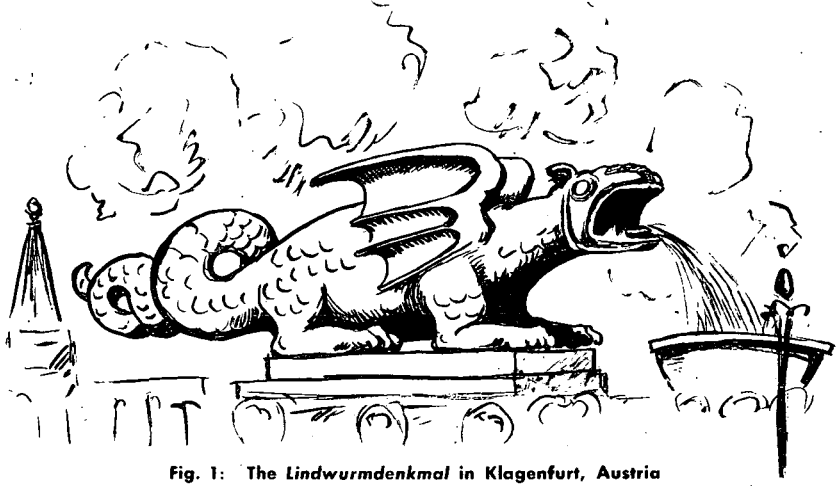

Fig. 1: The *Lindwurmdenkmal* in Klagenfurt, Austria

Drawings by Olga Ley

at the *Zollfeld*—the name means "customs field;" presumably some ducal boundary line ran through there at one time — in the vicinity of Klagenfurt. A gravel pit on this field is still called the dragon's pit.

These are the facts.

Now try to reconstruct from this legend what really happened; try to guess at the "original event." Well, obviously the dragon is actually the memory of large inimical animals which once existed; if not a memory of the dinosaurs, it might be a memory of large man-eating lizards of some kind. Mind you, the legend does not necessarily prove that these man-eating lizards lived around Klagenfurt, but it does seem to prove that such animals existed at one time and that our remote forefathers had trouble with them.

How about the shape — specifically the bat wings attached to the body of a lizard? Well, the shape is so traditional that it probably reflects the real shape of whatever it was, and as for the wings, who can say that they did not have wings in reality? Of course one might conclude that the wings are just symbolic, indicating that these animals were very fast. All reptiles can move fast, can't they? Have you ever seen a lizard turn around and run, or seen a snake strike?

(Having kept lizards, frogs and snakes for many years of my life, I know this fact well.)

All right, now let's go on to the

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giant who slays the dragon. What about him?

Well, in the first place, can one say that there never were giants? But it is possible that the meaning of the giant is symbolic, too. Just as the wings of the dragon — *if* they are symbolic — signify speed, so the large size of the giant might be taken to symbolize the incredible courage of our remote ancestors who stood up against these animals.

I did not make up these arguments. I could have quoted just this kind of reasoning from books, giving title, author, date and place of publication and page number, if desired. But that would have taken at least three times as much space as this condensation did.

At any event, these arguments have been seriously offered by people like Hörbiger and Dacqué. They sound reasonably logical and require only one two-part assumption, namely that a legend must have a cause and that this cause can be reconstructed by careful reasoning.

Fortunately, more than I have told so far is known in the case of the *Lindwurmdenkmal,* and because more is known, we can really reconstruct the background for the legend. The important point is that we cannot reconstruct it *from* the legend.

WHEN Ulrich Vogelsang carved his dragon, he had a model to go by — not a model of the whole animal, but at least a model for its head. He had the skull from the "dragon's pit" which had been found 235 years earlier. The nice thing about it all is that we still have the skull; it has been preserved in the Municipal Museum of the city of Klagenfurt.

It is the skull of a woolly rhinoceros of the Ice Age, known to zoologists and paleontologists as *Rhinoceros* (*Tichorhinus*) *antiquitatis.* Its nearest living relative is the white rhino of Africa.

Fig. 2: The skull of the "dragon pit"

You can see how the background splits right at this point into two backgrounds.

On the one hand, we have the background of the skull, which involves many thousands of man hours of scientific spade work (you can take the term literally, if you want to) leading to a knowledge of the Ice Age and the different kinds of animals which then inhabited Europe. Some of them including — or rather especially — the woolly

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rhinoceros certainly were a menace to "our remote ancestors."

On the other hand, you have the background for the remainder of the dragon. Can we sit back here and let the legend hunters take over, acting like the Great Detective who shuts himself up with his pipe and reasons it all out while the dumb policemen have to go around checking laundry marks, dental records and ringing doorbells? In reality, it is the police who get the results, and with some checking — of old books in this case — we can trace the remainder of the dragon, too.

The word "dragon" comes from the Greek *drako,* which was the term used for especially large snakes; simply large snakes of the python type. The Germanic word *lind* (or *lint*) also just means snake. Readers familiar with the *Nibelungenlied* may recall, at this point, that the leaf which fell between Siegfried's shoulder blades, producing his one vulnerable point, was a leaf from the *Linden* tree. Actually the two words have no known connection, but the similarity in sound made a good poetic alliteration, to an audience familiar with the word *lind* for snake.

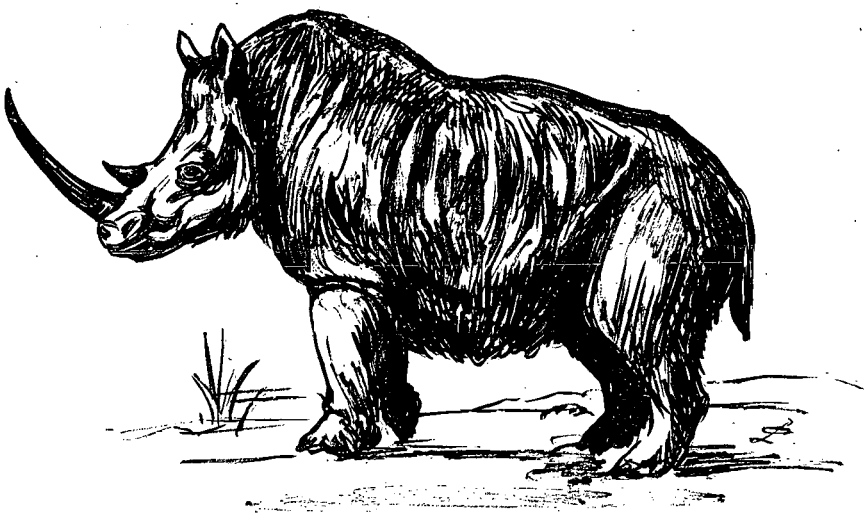

Fig. 3: How *Rhinoceros (Tichorhinus) antiquitatis* really looked

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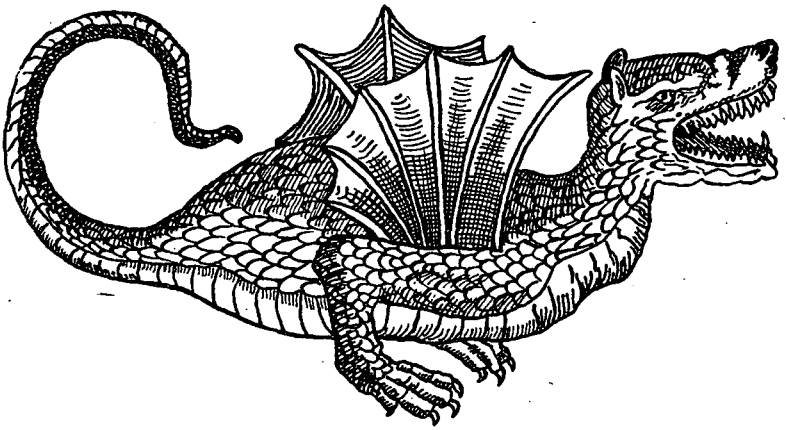

Fig. 4: "Young Dragon" as pictured in Pierre Belon's book

THE name dragon — or *Lindwurm* — therefore automatically suggested a snake-like body. Which again leaves the question of the wings. But these wings can be explained. The only assumption we have to make is that Ulrich Vogelsang had a few of the then better-known books to look at. We don't even have to assume that he could read, though an artist in the year 1590 probably could.

The Frenchman Pierre Belon — latinizing his name into Petrus Bellonius — had published his works on natural history some 30 years before that date, and in it is the picture of a "young dragon" (Fig. 4). It is the first picture where a dragon has wings. The reason: around the middle of the 16th century, the Javanese tree lizard — which later was called, half-jokingly, *Draco volans* or "flying dragon" — became known. It is a small lizard, with a maximum length of about four inches, which has a "parachute." Half a dozen "false ribs" stick out from its body, connected by a membrane. The membrane can be stretched out or partly folded, but otherwise these "wings" cannot move.

There you have the origin of the dragon shape of the monument: the skull of an extinct rhinoceros, the body from the name, and the wings from Pierre Belon's poor and probably second-hand drawing of a Javanese tree lizard.

And now I can go back to the argument about legends, and the two-part assumption that a

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legend must have a cause which can be discovered by reasoning. Yes to the first part; every legend certainly has a cause. But no to the second part; the legend itself very effectively cloaks its origin as a rule. Sometimes the cause can be unearthed, but only by the patient detail work which should have been applied in the first place.

BRINGING THE MOON DOWN TO EARTH

QUITE a number of years ago — at a guess, about 1922 — I encountered the name of André Laurie for the first time. I was then reading the German biography of Jules Verne, written by a Dr. Max Popp who was evidently an early science fiction fan, because nearly half of his 212-page book is devoted to stories of the Jules Verne type, but not written by Jules Verne.

"The hero of Laurie's story," Dr. Popp wrote, "intends to establish a connection between the Moon and the Earth by bringing the Moon to the Earth with the aid of an enormous magnet. The Moon does come uncomfortably close, but finally the friendly queen of the night proves to be more powerful than the magnetic mountain; the mountain is pulled out of the Earth and Laurie's travelers inadvertently reach the Moon in this manner."

Naturally I did not remember that paragraph verbatim — I just now looked it up for the purpose of translating it — but its content stuck in my mind. I also remembered (this is mentioned elsewhere in Dr. Popp's book) that this French novel bore an English title, *Selene Company Limited*. Sometimes, when I was in a library for different reasons and purposes, I would recall that there was an old French space travel novel I should read one day and checked the index cards for it, unsuccessfully each and every time.

In between, whenever a new book on old science fiction appeared, I looked for André Laurie; maybe somebody would give a more complete synopsis. Nobody ever did.

Matter of fact, nobody even mentioned André Laurie's name. Philip B. Gove's *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction* takes no notice of him. Neither does J. O. Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time*, which is remarkable for its omissions all the way through. But even Marjorie Nicolson in her *Voyages to the Moon* doesn't have a word to say about Laurie — possibly because he is too close to the present to be deserving of her rather patrician notice.

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The only place I found something about him is in Kenneth Allott's American Jules Verne biography where Allott says, with reference to the year 1885: "The only other publication that year was a work in collaboration with André Laurie — *The Wreck of the Cynthia.* Laurie admired Verne greatly and followed in his footsteps, writing scientific romances that had a wide circulation in France."

I finally got a copy of Laurie's book from an antiquarian, an English translation (called *The Conquest of the Moon*) published in 1894 in London. A label pasted inside states that this copy was awarded by B. Brucesmith, Esq., Principal of the Byron House and Ealing Grammar School, to William Henry Sinnott for being 1st in a class of 23 boys in Bookkeeping. I wonder whether the award winner ever read this book, which is rather removed from bookkeeping and, if so, what he thought of it.

Well, I read it. About 1:30 in the morning, my wife started complaining and I retired to my study with a bottle of wine, two cigars and the book. Is the book that wonderful? Yes, in the same way as the woman in England who was so incredibly ugly that no man could take his eyes off her.

DR. POPP had summarized the main theme quite well.

A French astronomer has the idea of bringing the Moon closer to the Earth and reasons that a sufficiently large magnet must be built to accomplish this feat. (Don't ask me why a magnet of any size should influence the Moon.) He looks for a mountain of pure iron ore which could be magnetized and finally finds one, by lucky coincidence in the French Sudan. The French Sudan was in various kinds of revolt and political troubles at the time, which helped to fill the book with all kinds of sub-plots.

When the mountain is found, the necessary money is raised — in Australia, of all places — and the work begins. First the base of the mountain is insulated by pouring molten glass into spaces made for the purpose. The engineering aspects of the venture are rather vague, but there is the interesting touch that the energy is furnished by solar collectors. At about the time Laurie wrote the book, the French Professor Mouchot (mentioned by Laurie) made experiments with solar collectors and steam engines for pumping water for irrigation in North Africa.

An observatory and living quarters are built on top of the mountain. Cables are wound around the mountain to convert

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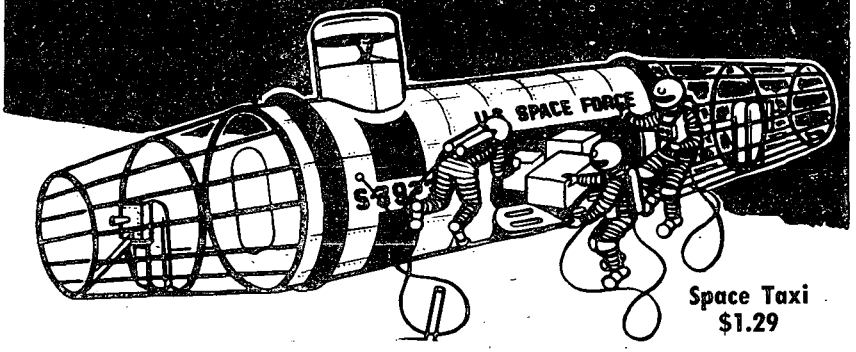

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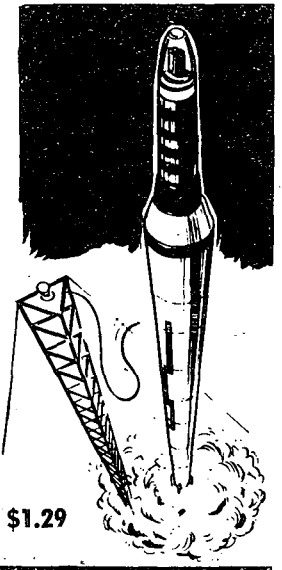

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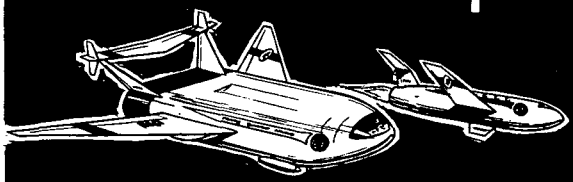

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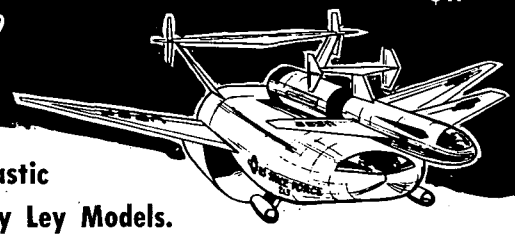

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it into an electromagnet. Meanwhile an army of Arab rebels lays siege to the observatory which, however, this possibility having been foreseen, is "well provisioned with everything." The mountain is then magnetized and the astronomer predicts that within five days and a number of hours the Moon would be close enough to "be inside the Earth's atmosphere."

Up to that point, the main quarrel of a present-day reader would be with a wrong premise and a ludicrous style which is partly the fault of an inept translator. But then the scientific fun begins.

Acted upon by the giant magnet, the Moon comes closer and closer.

But does that change its orbital period? Oh, no — from everything that is mentioned, it is quite clear that its orbital velocity remains just what it always was. Even when closer than 22,000 miles, it still rises in the east and sets in the west. In reality, the Moon's main behavior, aside from appearing larger in size, would be first an apparent slow-down in motion (due to the fact that its true orbital period would decrease so that its apparent motion would not be almost exclusively due to the Earth's turning on its axis) and then an apparent reversal with rising in the west and setting in the east.

At the last moment, somebody in the observatory panics and reverses the power, and that's when the magnetized mountain is torn from its undermined foundations and pulled toward the Moon. The people in the observatory are knocked unconscious and, after awakening, first think that the Moon had struck the Earth. After a considerable time, they realize that their whole mountain has jumped to the Moon, luckily landing with its base first.

BY that time — wonder of wonders — the Moon is back in its original orbit! (Kepler, Newton, Halley, Cassini, Gauss and a few dozen lesser lights must have orbited in their graves when this was printed.) The Moon did take a little air along so that the travelers have time to stuff rags into the cracks of the window frames and so forth.

Now they have to make oxygen. Fortunately there are tons and tons of potassium chlorate among the provisions. This provides them with the oxygen they need. While nothing was said as to how the oxygen was produced, I suspected that the figures were prodigiously wrong. After finishing the book (and getting my delayed sleep) I took a handbook to check a few facts. Yes, my

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handbook is recent, but these particular facts could also be found in the handbooks of André Laurie's time.

The chemistry of the case is this: potassium chlorate — the formula is $KClO_3$ — melts at not quite 700 degrees Fahrenheit. When you heat it beyond its melting point, you get the following transformation:

$$2\ KClO_3 \longrightarrow 2\ KCl + 3\ O_2$$

There is a small amount of practical trouble involved. It does not work below the melting point of the substance, but at only 50 degrees Fahrenheit above melting point, the release of oxygen is so violent that it can almost be called an explosion. Nowadays we can make this safe by adding an oxide of manganese (MnO_2) which causes the same reaction at lower temperatures. I don't know whether this was known at the time the book was written.

More important is the fact that the decomposition of potassium chlorate will produce about two-fifths of its weight in pure oxygen. Allowing for poor equipment and other losses, we'll say that every four pounds of potassium chlorate produce one pound of pure oxygen.

Now what does Mr. Laurie's hero do?

As the lunar night approaches, he prepares the necessary oxygen for a dozen people for two weeks. So he decomposes 22 tons of potassium chlorate. Since this is a French book, these would be metric tons, totaling 48,501 lbs. avoirdupois. This would produce a minimum of 12,000 lbs. of oxygen, probably more, whereas twelve people will need about 600 lbs. of oxygen in two weeks.

Mr. Laurie has no excuse for this slip except the true one — he neglected to do his arithmetic. (That at another point the three villains dump something into a crater six million yards deep I take to be a translator's error. The original probably read *six mille metres,* 6000 meters.)

WELL, now, do I expect a novelist to calculate these things? The answer is: I do; but Monsieur Laurie did a few other things which are equally horrible and have nothing to do with arithmetic. For example, a dead man is found somewhere. A doctor who is a member of the party whips out his stethoscope to listen to the heartbeat and *then remembers that there is no sound on the moon!* He has to feel for the corpse's pulse instead! It was known in Laurie's day that not only air transmits sound.

Then they find an ancient building of the long-dead selenites. They marvel at the size of

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the structure, but they remember that "since the Moon's gravity is only 1/6 of what we have on Earth, the foundations must be made more massive and dug deeper down in proportion." Why? To support one-sixth as much weight?

Once inside they see a number of artifacts "made of pure gold, now tarnished with age." And I always thought that one of the attractive things about gold is that it does not tarnish or discolor. It does not even dirty easily.

And so it goes on. I just could not stop reading in incredulous but sustained amazement. In the end the travelers get home: they use their magnetic mountain once more to graze the Earth's atmosphere and then jump off with a large parachute. (Yes, the Moon snaps back into its orbit again.) Then they find that nobody will believe their tale.

No question about it, the "good old science fiction" had more "sense of wonder" than today's. Almost every page of *The Conquest of the Moon* makes one wonder how it got by the author, editor, typesetter, proofreader and reader.

This book aside, some of the good old science fiction was good. Now it is merely old.

ANY QUESTIONS?

MISS Petra Helmssen of Carbondale, Illinois, writes me as follows:

At a party recently, a young man said that he could write down, without any preparation, numbers of six figures all of which would be divisible by 13 and also by 11. He made good his boast. Miss Helmssen wrote down a few of the numbers he produced, but states that he went on for almost an hour. The numbers she transmitted to me were 495,495; 318,318; 957,957 and 101,101. The question was, "How did he do it?"

I did not know how, but as I brooded over the numbers, the last one caught my interest. It was obviously a multiple of 1001. So were all the others, I saw, as soon as I realized the fact. Now 1001 is divisible by 13, by 11 and, as you can find out easily, also by 7. In fact, 1001 is 7 times 11 times 13. In order to produce figures divisible by 13 and by 11, you don't have to do anything more strenuous than to mentally multiply 1001 with anything — anything at all.

Mr. D. A. Turner of Visalia, California, has a far more serious problem on his mind. "Is it not possible, or even likely, that a few years from now a manned space vehicle might be rammed and destroyed by one of the many, many (by then) Sputnik-

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Vanguard-etc. satellites whizzing around Earth in their various and sundry orbits? Is this problem of man-made space hazards being given any attention at this time?"

The answer to the question is yes, naturally scientists are very much aware of this problem. One of the reasons why research satellites were placed on long elliptical orbits with their perigees inside the atmosphere was that satellites in such orbits would clear themselves out of space again by gradual orbital decay and final burn-up.

On January 1st, 1960, nine artificial satellites were in orbit; by December 31st, only six of these will be left. Three of them are expected to burn up this year — coincidentally, at about the time this issue will be on the newsstands, namely Sputnik III, Explorer VI and Discoverer VIII. Twenty years from now, only two will be still in orbit — Vanguard I and Russia's Cosmic Rocket III, the one that took the first pictures of the far side of the Moon.

In short, the intention, when a satellite is fired into orbit, is that it will burn up in the end. But every once in a while one happens to slip into an orbit where even the perigee is so high as to be outside the Earth's atmosphere. This happened with Vanguard I and was a more or less accidental result of the shot around the Moon. The latter could just as easily have run into the Earth on its first trip back.

In time, a number of such accidentally too-lucky shots will accumulate in space and will have to be removed when the era of manned space flight arrives. What better way to take them out of space than by a manned maneuverable ship?

TWO MEN AND ONE BIKE

THE riddles I stuck in just for fun in recent columns, such as the one about the number of hairs on a girl's head, seem to have been received with enthusiasm. Readers asked for more although one sternly cautioned "Don't use the same that Martin Gardner has in the *Scientific American*." I won't. But here is another.

The main means of transportation in The Netherlands is the bicycle. Unlike bicycles elsewhere, Netherlands bikes must follow traffic regulations and patterns as if they were automobiles. Moreover, there is a strictly enforced rule: three days in jail for both if the rider lets someone else ride on the handlebars.

Now we have Cornelis Potgieter and Pieter van Gelderbrook

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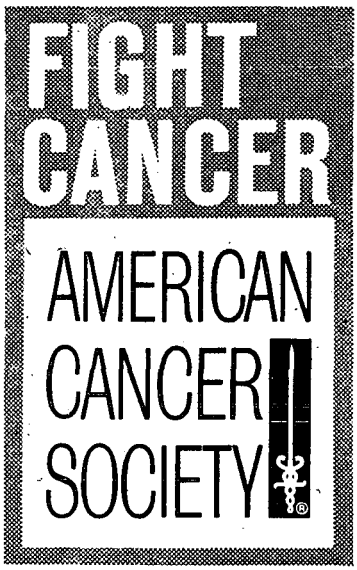
standing on a road. They both have to be in a place 10 kilometers away. They should arrive more or less at the same time. And they have only one bike.

Says Cornelis: "Tell you what we do. Here is a key to my padlock, I'll ride 500 meters ahead and chain the bike to a tree. You walk, then take the bike and ride 500 meters. I keep walking in the same direction in the meantime. Then I take my bike which you have chained to a tree after 500 meters of riding and ride 500 meters myself, and we keep alternating till we get to our destination."

Question is: what do they gain by this procedure? Or do they gain anything at all?

— WILLY LEY



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Giving Certain Powers the business for a change would be a joy — but it must not backfire — and here at last was the perfect recoilless diddle!

THE BUSINESS, AS USUAL

By JACK SHARKEY Illustrated by TRATTNER

IN 1962, the United States Air Force found itself possessed of a formidable tool of battle, a radar resistant airplane. While this was the occasion for much rejoicing among the Defense Department members who were cleared for Top Secret, this national-defense solution merely posed a greater problem: What should we do with it?

"There must," said the Secretary of Defense, "be some utilization of this new device to demonstrate to 'Certain Powers' that the world can be made safe for Freedom and Democracy!"

"'Certain Powers,' my foot," said the President. "Why don't we ever come out and just *say* it?"

"Policy," the Secretary said. "We've always walked softly in our Foreign Policy; especially softly in cases where we didn't have the 'big stick' to carry."

"Well," grumbled the President, "we've got the big stick now. What do we do with it?"

"We just want to shake it a bit," said the Secretary. "No contusions intended, of course. We

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just have to let them know we *have* it, but are too kind-hearted to use it. Unless provoked, naturally."

"I can see," said the President, "that this new plane is burning a hole in your pocket. Suppose we do send it flying over Rus —"

"*Mister* President!" said the Secretary of Defense.

The President sighed. "All right, all right. Flying over 'Certain Areas,' then. Let's say we get it there. Fine. What do we do with it? Drop leaflets?"

"No. That comes under the proselytizing clause in the Geneva Conference of '59."

"I don't suppose a small — well, you know."

"Aggression," said the Secretary. "We'd lose face in the Middle East."

"So?" demanded the President, spreading his hands. "They don't like us anyhow, do they? Or the competition — or each other, for that matter."

"That's not the point. We have to *feel* as though our dollars are buying friends, whether or not it's true."

"Well, then, what *can* we do?" said the President. "No leaflets, no aggression. We couldn't maybe seed their clouds and make it rain on them?"

"And get sued by other countries for artificially creating low-pressure conditions that, they could claim, robbed them of their rightful rainfall? We've had it happen right here between our own states."

"Maybe we should just forget about it, then?"

"Never! It must be demonstrated to the world that —"

"We could take a full-page ad in the New York *Times*."

"It just isn't done that way," the Secretary protested.

"Why not? It'd save money, wouldn't it? A simple ad like, *'Hey, there, Certain Powers! Lookie what we got!'* What'd be wrong with that?"

"They'd accuse us of Capitalistic Propaganda, that's what! And to get the egg off our face, we'd have to demonstrate the plane and —"

"And be right back where we are now," the President realized aloud, nodding gloomily. "Okay, so what do we do?"

The Secretary looked to left and right, although they were alone together in a soundproofed, heavily guarded room, before replying.

"We drop an agent!" he whispered.

THE President blinked twice before responding. "Have you gone mad? What man in his right mind would volunteer for such a thing? 'Drop an agent,' indeed! Ten minutes after land-

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ing, he'd be up against a wall and shot. Wouldn't *that* be lovely for Freedom and Democracy? We'd have the R — the Certain Powers gloating over the air waves for weeks about nipping a Capitalist Assassination Plot in the bud, not to mention the Mothers of America beating down the White House door because one of Our Boys was sacrificed. You know how our country reacts: If an entire division is wiped out, we bite the bullet and erect statues and make speeches and then forget it. But let a single man get in dutch and the whole populace goes crazy until something is 'done' about it. No, it won't work."

"May I finish?" said the Secretary patiently.

The President shrugged. "Why not?"

"This agent would be something special, sir. One that would not only demonstrate our new aircraft, but which would positively leave the R—damn, you've got *me* doing it! — Certain Powers tied in knots. In point of fact, our military psychologists think that this agent might be the wedge to split Communism apart in hopeless panic!"

"Really?" the President said, with more enthusiasm than he had shown throughout the entire meeting. "I'd like to meet this agent."

The Secretary pressed a black button upon the conference table. An instant later, the door opened and the Secretary's personal aide stepped in. "Yes, sir?"

"Jenkins, have the corridor cleared and Secret Service men posted at all entrances and exits. When it's safe, bring in Agent X-45." He paused. "And Professor Blake, too."

"At once, sir." Jenkins hurried out.

"X-45?" said the President. "Has he no name?"

The Secretary smiled inscrutably. "Teddy, sir."

"Why that smirk?"

"You'll see, sir."

They sat in fidgety silence for another minute, and then a buzzer sounded, twice.

"Ah, that's Jenkins," said the Secretary, and pressed the button once more.

Jenkins came in, followed by a tall gray-haired man who carried a large black suitcase. The President arose, and, as Jenkins left the room again, shook hands with the man. "Agent X-45?" he asked.

"Professor Charles Blake," the man corrected him calmly. "Agent X-45 is in here."

The President stared. "In the *suitcase?* What are we sending? A *dwarf?*"

"Hardly," said the Secretary, snapping up the hasps on the

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suitcase and opening it upon the table. "This," he said, lifting something from under tissue-paper padding, "is Agent X-45."

The President's gaze was returned by two shiny black eyes, set on either side of a little brown muzzle with a gentle, stitched-on smile. Agent X-45 was clad in flight helmet, miniature jacket and tiny boots, with a baggy pair of brown canvas trousers belted at the waist with a bandolier holding a dozen small wooden bullets, and dangling a patent-leather holster containing a plastic water pistol. And he wore a small parachute and harness.

"But that's a teddy bear!" cried the President.

"Precisely," Professor Blake said.

"I THINK I'll sit down," said the President, and did so, visibly looking like a man who believes he is surrounded by lunatics.

"And look here!" said the Secretary, slipping his hand within Teddy's jacket and withdrawing a small oilskin pouch. "It's rather rudimentary, but the Cyrillic lettering is genuine, and our ambassador assures us the layout is correct."

The President took the pouch, unfolded it and drew out a small sheet of paper, covered with the inscrutable letterings, and numerous rectangles and curving red lines.

"I give up," he said. "What is it?"

"A map of the Kremlin," said the Secretary, his eyes dancing. "That big red 'X' is the location of the Politburo Council Chamber."

"Perhaps," the President said weakly, "you could explain . . . ?"

"Mister President," said Professor Blake, "I am the new Chief of Propaganda for the government."

The President nodded, poured himself a glass of water from a pitcher and drained it. "Yes, yes?" he said.

"Naturally, I have spent my career studying the psychology of a Certain Power . . ."

The President groaned. "Please, gentlemen, let's name names! It need never go outside this room. *My* lips are sealed!"

The professor and the Secretary exchanged a look, a raising of eyebrows, then a shrug of surrender.

"Very well," said Blake. "Russia —"

"There," said the President. "That's more like it."

Blake cleared his throat and went on.

"We know the weak spot in the Russian armor is the mentality of the average Communist official," he explained, while the

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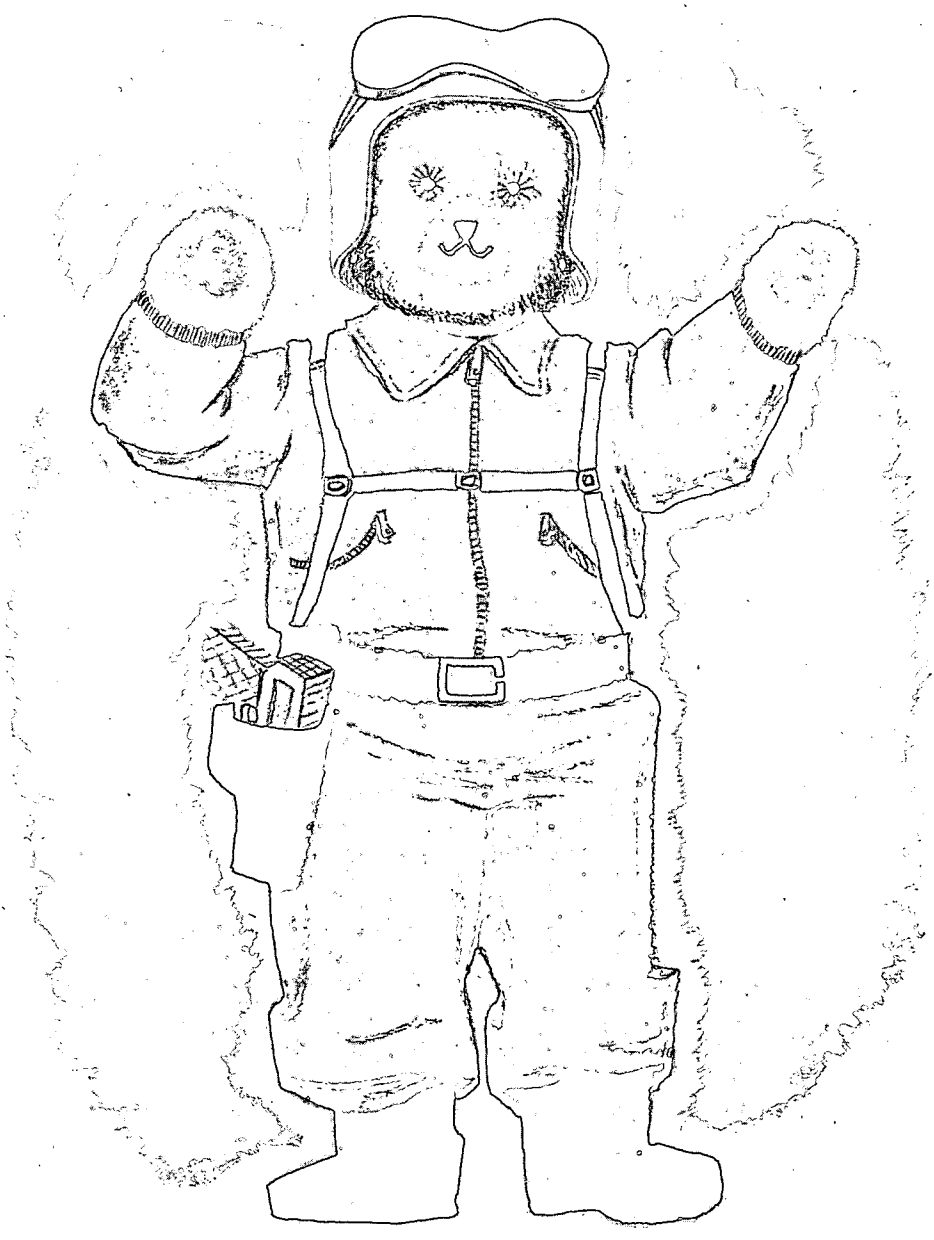

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Secretary, who had heard this all before, fiddled with the straps of Teddy's parachute and hummed softly to himself. "They have a distrust complex. Everything and everybody is under 24-hour-a-day suspicion."

"Yes, so I hear," said the President.

"What do you suppose would happen to an agent that was caught by the Russians?" asked Blake.

"I'd rather not even think about that."

"Not the sadistic details, sir. I mean the general train of events, from the time of capture onward."

The President pondered this. "After his capture," he said thoughtfully, "he would be questioned. Through various methods — hopelessly at variance with the regulations of the Geneva Convention — they would discover his mission, and then he would be shot, I guess, or imprisoned."

Blake nodded grimly. "And what if an agent landed there that could *not* divulge his mission?"

THE Secretary stopped fiddling with the harness and watched the President's face. On the worn features he read first puzzlement, then incredulity, then a flash of sheer amazement.

"Good heavens!" said the President. "They'd — they'd have to admit a defeat, I suppose . . ."

"But can they?" Blake leaned forward and slammed his fist upon the tabletop. "Can the Communist mentality ever admit that it's been bested?"

"I—I guess not. At least, they never do," said the President. "But this —" he wagged a forefinger at the stuffed thing on the table — "this certainly won't upset them. I mean, after all . . ." He looked from one to the other for agreement and found none. "But, gentlemen, it's nothing but a stuffed bear!"

"It won't upset them?" queried Blake slowly. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. They'll find the bear, wherever it lands, and they'll — well, they'll *know* it's a gag and just laugh at us."

"*How* will they know?" Blake persisted.

"Well, they'll be *pretty* well certain!" the President said scathingly. "I mean a stuffed toy —"

"Would they give up on something of which they were 'pretty well' certain?"

"They'd have to. Teddy, here, certainly couldn't tell them anything. They'd say it was a joke and forget it . . ." His voice barely sounded the last few words. He no longer believed them. A smile flickered upon his face. "Gentlemen, you don't think they'd —"

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"The Russians," said Blake, without emotion, "would go off their rockers, sir. To be unable to explain a thing like this would devastate their morale. The Communist is a man who must hold all the aces. He'll shuffle and reshuffle until he gets them, too. Well, we're giving him a cold deck, sir. There are no aces for him to find."

"Hmmm," said the President. "As long as there's any doubt in their minds, they'll have to keep plugging at it, won't they! And since there's no solution —" His smile grew calculating. "Yes, yes I begin to see. It's a small thing, to be sure, but I find I must leap at the opportunity to stick a few ants in *their* pants for a change."

"It won't wipe them out," began the Secretary.

"But it'll wear them down a little," Blake finished.

"Done!" said the President. "How soon can we get Operation Frustration under way?"

"The plane is ready to leave right now," said the Secretary, with a small blush. "I — I rather thought you'd see this thing our way."

The President frowned at this, then shrugged. "Good enough. Let's get this bear into the air."

"YOU sure this plane will work?" asked the President, averting his face from the spray of leaves caught up in the shrieking jet stream of the waiting plane.

"It's too simple not to," said Blake, clutching the suitcase — on whose side a large red "Top Secret" had been stenciled — to his chest, and shouting over the scream of the plane. "The radar-resistant device is nothing more than a radio-receiver that blankets the structure, making the entire plane a receiver. If it receives the radar impulses, they can't bounce back and make a blip on the enemy radar screens."

The President sighed. "You make it sound almost too easy. Very well." He shook the man's hand. "Good luck."

"Thank you, sir," said Blake, patting the suitcase. "I'll take good care of Teddy."

The President nodded and moved away. Blake boarded the jet, and, minutes later, the President was watching a last fading streamer of the twin exhausts dwindling upon the eastern horizon.

"I shan't sleep till he's back," said the Secretary.

"Nor I," said the President. "I have the weirdest damned apprehension . . ."

"About what, sir?" asked the Secretary, as they made their way from the field.

"About the —" the President looked around, then lowered his

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voice to a whisper — "the Russians. There's something in their makeup we may have overlooked."

"Impossible, sir," said the Secretary of Defense. "Blake is our top psychologist."

"I hope you're right. If this fails, I'd hate for it to be traced to us."

"It can't be. The jacket was made in Japan, the boots in Mexico, the parachute in —"

"I know, I know," said the President. "But if they *should* trace it to us, we'll be a laughingstock."

"They won't," the Secretary assured him.

TWO days later, Blake was back, his manner jovial when he met in secret session once more with the two executives.

"Couldn't have gone more perfectly, gentlemen," he said, rubbing his hands together and bouncing on his toes. "We passed directly over Moscow, at a height of ten miles, on the stroke of midnight. The night was overcast and starless. Teddy was dropped through the bomb bay. I saw his parachute open myself. He's down there now, and we're sure to see signs any day now of the little cracks in the Iron Curtain."

"You had no trouble with the enemy?" the President asked, though the answer — since Blake was back alive — was obvious.

"None," Blake said. "The radar shield performed exactly as specified, sir. Not a blink of a searchlight nor a single ground-to-air rocket did we see. Perhaps, on hearing us pass by, they sent up an investigating plane or two, but we were long gone by then. That's the advantage of moving faster than the sound you make," he added pontifically.

"I still feel we've overlooked something," said the President. "In the back of my mind, a small voice keeps trying to remind me of something about the Russians, something that should have made me veto this whole scheme at the start."

Blake looked puzzled. "What about them, sir? If it's in regard to their psychology, I can assure you —".

"I don't mean their psychology at *all*," said the President. "No, wait — yes, I do, in a minor way. They must pursue this thing, no matter what, but —"

A light glimmered, then burned brightly in the President's eyes, and he stood up and smacked his fist into his open palm. "Of course!" he said. "Their methods!"

"Methods?" asked Blake, a little nervously.

The President's reply was interrupted by a knock at the door.

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The three men exchanged a look; then the Secretary jabbed the button, and Jenkins came in.

"This just came for you, sir," he said, handing the Secretary a small envelope, and making his exit silently.

The President waited impatiently as the envelope was torn open and its contents read. Then the Secretary's hands opened limply and the message fell upon the table.

"Diplomatic note — Russian — Teddy," he whispered.

"What!" yelped the President. He snatched the paper from the table and read it, then sank into his chair once more, his face grim and eyes suspiciously moist. "The dirty, lowdown, rotten . . ."

Blake, hovering at tableside, hesitated a moment, then asked, "What about Teddy? What's happened?"

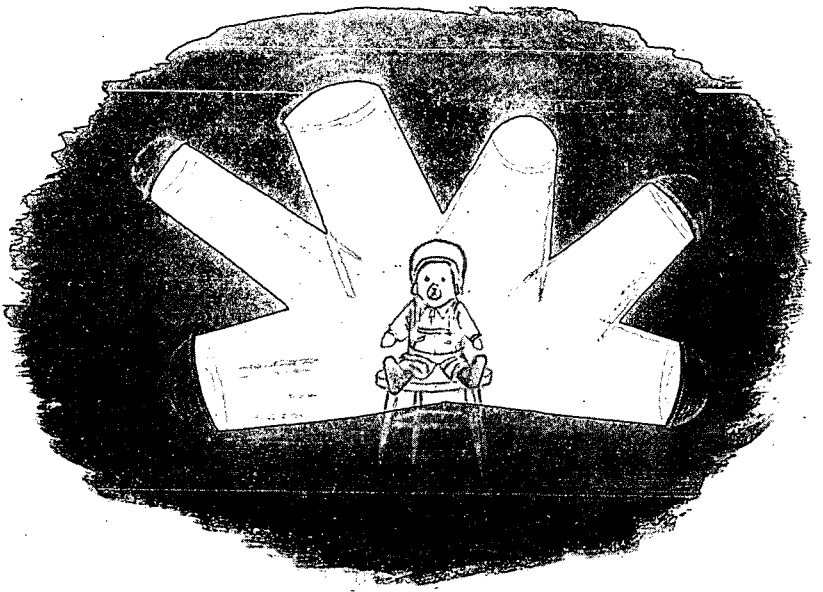
"What we might have expected," said the Secretary dolefully.

"You don't mean —" Blake mumbled, horrified. He couldn't continue, just waited for the worst.

The President nodded miserably.

"He's confessed."

— JACK SHARKEY



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SORDMAN

BY TOM PURDOM

Illustrated by WOOD

In a beer hall on the eighty-first floor of the Hotel Mark Twain fourteen men held an adolescent girl prisoner.

"I'll go up there by myself," Sordman said.

He was a big young man with sloppy black hair and a red beard. His fashionably ornate clothes covered the body of a first class Talent. Disciplined training, plus drugs and his natural gift, had made him one of the four truly *developed* psionic adepts in the world. With drugs and preparation, he could command the entire range of psi powers. Without drugs, he could sense the emotions and sometimes the general thought patterns of the people near him.

"We'd better go with you," Lee Shawn said. "There's an awful lot of fear up there. They'll kill you as soon as they learn you're a Talent."

She was a lean, handsome woman in her early forties. A lawyer-politician, she was the Guggenheim Foundation's lobbyist. For years she had fought against laws to outlaw the development of Talent.

"Thanks, Mama, but I think I'd better go alone."

Sordman, though he didn't tell her, knew that symbolically Lee saw him as the tree and herself as the rain and the earth.

"Go ahead and laugh," George Aaron said. "But you'll need big medicine to fight that fear. Lee's symbolic place in your psyche is important."

"I've thought it over," Sordman said. "I'll depend on God and nothing else."

He felt George's mind squirm. As a psychologist, George accepted Sordman's Zen-Christian faith because Sordman needed it to control the powers of his Talent.

But George himself was a confirmed skeptic.

The men up there were scared. Sordman knew he would die if he lost control. But Lee and George were scared, too. Even now, standing in the park in early morning, their fear battered at his mind.

He thought about swimming in the ocean. He made his skin remember salted wind. The real Atlantic, a mile away, helped the illusion.

It was the right symbol. He felt his friends calm.

"Let him go," George said.

"He's manipulating us," Lee said.

"I know. But let him go."

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THE PROTECTOR

He was the most powerful man in the world. He could make anybody do anything—and yet he was the slave of a mad criminal's mind!

Sordman laughed. Lee bent and tore a clump of grass from the earth. "Take this, Andy."

"Thank you."

It was wet with dew. He held it to his nose and smelled the dirt and grass. Two things kept him from destruction by his own Talent. He loved the physical world and he believed in God.

"I'll call you if I need you," he said.

"Be careful," George said. "Many people need you."

"You've got status," Lee said. "Use it. You're dealing with the kind of people it impresses."

THE hotel stood three hundred stories tall. Surrounded by a five-mile-square park, connected to the major coastal cities by high speed vacuum tubes, the building was a small town. Eighty-five thousand people lived within its walls.

Sordman rode an empty elevator. Through the glass sides he studied the deserted halls and shops.

They were frightened here. Murder had been done. A Talent had destroyed two men. *Lord, protect us from the malice of a witch.*

The eighty-first was a commercial floor. He got off the vator and walked down the main corridor. A man watched him through the door of a bar. A girl in a blue kimono froze behind the counter of a pastry shop.

He stopped before the doors of the beer hall. He dropped to his knees and prayed.

Once the brave leader walked into a panicky group and it was enough to *look* calm. Now he had to *be* calm. It was not enough to square the shoulders, walk erect, speak in a confident tone. Sordman's true emotions radiated from him every moment. Those within range felt them as their own.

He drove thoughts like knives into the deepest corners of his mind. He begged release from fear. He prayed his God to grant him love for the frightened men within.

He stood erect and squared his shoulders. His bulb-shouldered morning coat was grey as dawn. He thought a well loved formula, a Buddhist prayer from the Book

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of Universal Worship. *All life is transitory. All people must suffer and die. Let us forgive one another.*

He roared his name and titles at the door.

"I am Talent Andrew Sordman, Fellow for Life of the Guggenheim Foundation, by Senate Act Protector of the People! By the laws of our country, I ask the right to enter."

Silence.

"I am Talent Andrew Sordman, Fellow—"

"Go away, witch!"

Without drugs and preparation, Sordman needed visual contact to sense emotions. But he didn't need Talent to sense the hatred in that voice.

He pictured a rough block of stone.

Using a basic skill, he kept the picture in his mind as he opened the door and planned his words.

"I have taken no drugs and made no preparation. You have nothing to fear. I'm your Protector and I've come to talk."

THE beer hall was large and gloomy. The butts and ashes of the night's smoking filled its trays. Fourteen men watched him come. Half a dozen had hunting rifles.

Hunched over, weeping, a thin, dark-haired girl sat beneath an unshaded light. A shiver of anger crossed his brain.

"Kill the witch!" a young man shouted.

Lord, grant me love . . .

His eyes focused on the rifle bearers. One of them half-raised his gun. Then the butt clumped on the floor.

"You're bewitched!" the young man said. "I told you not to let him in."

"I've come to talk," Sordman said. "Who's the leader of your group?"

The young man said, "We don't have a leader. Here we're all equals."

Sordman studied the young man's emotions. He was frightened, but only a little more than the others. There was something else there, too. Something very strong. Sex frustration! The young man had an athletic body and a handsome, chiselled face. On his yellow vest he wore the emblem of a Second Class Technician. But even a young man with adequate finances could be frustrated. Keeping the stone in his mind, he undressed a certain actress.

He loved women and engaged in sex with lusty, triumphant joy. To him it was a celebration of the sacred mystery of life. He hoped some of this emotion reached its target.

He started talking without asking for a parley.

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"Two men died yesterday. I've come to hunt out the murderer and put him away. What's the evidence against this girl?"

"We found drugs and a divining rod in her room."

"She's had a reputation for a long time."

"The school kids say she's a daydreamer."

Sordman understood their fear. Psi was a new and dangerous force. Its use demanded moral and intellectual discipline. Only a rare and carefully developed personality could encounter the anger, hostility and fear in other minds and still retain compassion and reasonable respect for human beings. An undisciplined person panicked and went into a mental state approaching paranoia. Sordman fought panic every day. He fought it with a total acceptance of human motivations, cultivated tenderness and compassion, and a healthy ego which could accept and enjoy its own self-love.

Those things, Sordman would have said, and also the necessary grace of God.

But the most undisciplined personality could practice psi destructively. Hostile minds roamed the world. Death could strike you in a clear field beneath an open sky while your murderer lay home in his bed. No wonder they dragged a girl from her parents and bullied her till dawn.

THEY talked. Sordman picked his way through fourteen minds. As always, he found what he wanted.

A fat, redheaded man sat a little apart from the group. He radiated a special kind of concern. He was concerned for the girl and for his own children. He believed the actions of the night had been necessary, but he felt the girl's pain and he wasn't sure he was doing the right thing.

Above all, he was a man who wanted to do the right thing — the really right thing.

"You all have children," Sordman said. "Would you like to see them dragged out at night and treated the way you've treated this girl?"

"We've got to protect ourselves!" the young man said.

"Let him talk!" the fat man growled. He stared at the thick hands he spread on the table. "The girl has said all night she's innocent. Maybe she is. Maybe the Protector can do what we haven't done and find the real killer."

"I'm a master Talent," Sordman said. "If the killer is in the hotel, I can track him down before midnight. Will you give me that long?"

"How do we know you'll bring in the right man?"

"If he's the right man, he'll make it plain enough."

"You'll make him confess," the

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young man said. "You'll manipulate him like a puppet."

"What good will that do?" Sordman said. "Do you think I could control a man all the time he's in prison and on trial? If I use my Talent more than a few hours, I collapse."

"Can we hold the girl here?" asked the redheaded fat man.

"Feed her and treat her right," Sordman said. "What's your name?"

"John Dyer. My friends were about to use their belts on her."

A rifleman shuffled uneasily. "It's the only way. Mind killers use their Talent to tie their tongues and confuse us. Only pain can break their control."

"That's a fairy tale," Sordman said. "Without drugs a Talent is helpless."

"We've got the girl," John Dyer said. "She can't hurt us while we're waiting."

"*He can!*" the young man screamed. "Are you a plain fool? He can go outside and kill us all."

Sordman laughed. "Sure I could. And tomorrow I'd have to fight off an army. That I couldn't do if I was fool enough to try. You're frightened, boy. Use your head."

"You are excited, Leonard," said an armed man. He wore a blue morning coat with Manager's stars and the emblem of a transportation company. "We can wait a day. If we've got the killer, then we're safe. If we don't, then we've failed and the Protector should try."

"I'm not frightened. I just don't like Talent."

Most of the men frowned. They didn't share the prejudice. A few nodded and mumbled and shot dark glances at Sordman.

He let them talk. He stood there and thought apple pies and the brotherhood of man and the time he and his second wife spent three days in bed. And the big block of stone.

He was a high-powered transmitter broadcasting joy, good will toward men and tranquility.

In the end they listened to Dyer.

"But don't think you'll get a minute past midnight," said the young man.

"Technician, your Protector will remember."

—

CLARKE ESPONITO had been a hard, quick little man in his early fifties. On the day of his death, the hotel newspaper had published his picture and announced his promotion to Director of Vocational Testing for the entire Atlantic Region. He had lived with his wife and his nineteen-year-old son, and his wife had been a lifetime wife. Esponito had been a Catholic, and that faith still called short-term marriages a mortal sin.

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For a moment Sordman wondered what it would be like to know only one woman your entire life. He loved the infinite variety of God's creation and wanted to sample as much of it as he could.

"Mylady Widow, our apologies." Lee bowed, hands before her chest, and Sordman and George Aaron bowed with her. "We intrude on you," Lee said, "only because we have to find the real killer. Other people may be in danger."

The Widow Esponito bowed in return.

"I understand, Politician Shawn."

Even with her face scarred by tears she looked lovely. From the earliest years of their marriage, her husband had been high in the Civil Service and able to buy her beauty treatments.

"Mylady," Sordman said, "I need your help for two things. We want to know who you think wanted to kill your husband. And we need your want."

"Our want?" her son asked. He stood rigidly beside his mother's chair. His clothes were rich and formal tweed.

"Do you want to find the killer?"

The boy nodded soberly. "The moment I heard of his murder, I promised to avenge him."

"John!" His mother trembled. "You were raised to be a Christian!"

Sordman said, "I want to locate the image I think was used to kill him. For that I want to hook your strong desires into my thoughts. You won't know I'm doing it. But if you're near me, I'll use your emotions."

"Your husband was a very important man," Lee said. "Would anyone gain by his death?"

"Everyone liked my husband. He was always laughing, he—" The old-young woman started crying. Her son put his arm around her shoulders.

SORDMAN felt her pain and winced. Death and pain were part of Creation, but he hated them and often cursed them. At times like these, he understood George's skepticism.

The boy said, "Manager Kurt didn't like him."

Mylady stifled her sobs and sat up. "Manager Kurt has been our guest every month. Protector, John's upset. He's talking wildly."

"Father told me. He said Manager Kurt didn't like him."

"Your father and the Manager were good friends."

He felt a sudden resentment in the woman. Why? The boy didn't feel as if he was lying. Maybe Esponito had been the kind of man who didn't talk about his job with his wife. But his son — who would some day be a member of his father's class—would have received a certain amount of practical ad-

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vice. Perhaps Mylady resented being left out of her husband's professional life. That was a common family pattern, after all.

George felt impatient. Sordman shot him a questioning glance. "Where does Manager Kurt live?"

"In Baltimore," the boy said.

"Mylady, may we use your phone?"

"You don't take John seriously?" Mylady said.

"We'll have to ask the Baltimore police to check on the Manager. It may not mean anything, but we have to follow every lead."

"Use the phone, Protector."

Sordman and George stepped into the dining room.

"We're wasting time," George said. "They're both upset and there seems to be a family quarrel."

"I know. But Esponito's murder gives us more leads than Bedler's. Bedler didn't even have a one-month wife when he died. Lots of people knew the Administrator and might have had a grudge against him."

George clasped his hands behind his back. "We've unraveled twenty-three murders in the last four years. Judging by that experience, I'd say there are three possibilities: both victims were picked at random; both victims are in some way related; or one victim was killed to confuse the police."

"Unless we have something entirely new."

"That's been the pattern so far."

"I think we're both coming to the same conclusion."

"Find out if the murderer used the picture from the paper?"

"Mmm. If he did, Administrator Esponito was probably attacked on the spur of the moment. And we should be seeing who wanted to kill Bedler."

"What about Manager Kurt?"

"Have Lee call the Baltimore police while I try to locate the murder weapon. At least they can search his home for drugs."

GEORGE went back to the parlor and Sordman stripped to his yellow vest. From the pockets of his morning coat he removed a leather case and a tiny plastic package. Unfolded, the plastic became a thin red robe with a yellow bomb-burst on the back.

He called it his battle robe. Habit played a big part in the development of Talent. The same clothing, the same ritualized movements, helped put his mind in the proper state.

He filled a hypodermic with a pink liquid and jabbed the needle into his wrist. As the drug took effect, he knelt to pray.

"Grant me, God, the strength to bind the demons in my mind."

He stood up. At this point many Talents danced. Sordman loved to use his body, but ritual dancing made him feel ridiculous. It had

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been proven, however, that the Power flowed at its freest when the body was occupied, so he took three colored balls from the case and started juggling.

The balls soared higher and faster. He mumbled a hymn. His voice grew stronger. He roared his love of life at the world.

The wall between his conscious and unconscious mind collapsed. Lightning flashed in his eyes. Colors sang in his brain. Walls, floor, table, chairs became extensions of his mind. They danced with the balls between his hands. The Universe and he flowed together like a sea of molten iron.

His hands, miles from his mind, fumbled in the case. The balls danced and bobbed in the air. He laughed and unfolded his divining rod. The furniture bounced. My-lady Esponito screamed.

All Creation is a flow. Dance, you parts of me, you living things, you atoms of my dust!

He had torn Esponito's photo from a newspaper. Now he let the colored balls drop and stuck the picture on the end of the rod.

"This and that are one in kind. Servant rod, find me that!"

He stretched out the rod and turned on his heels. He sang and blanked his mind and listened to the tremors in his hands.

Stop. Back right. Now the left. Too far. Down. Correct left . . .

Here!

He pressed a button on the rod. A tripod sprang out. A pair of sights flipped up. Carefully he sighted down the rod, out through the window-wall beside the table, to a grove of trees in the park.

CREATION roaring in his open head, divining rod in hand, he stormed out the door and down the hall. Lee and George hurried after him. The presence of their well known minds pleased him. There was George's unexpressed belief that he had "mastered" and guided the Power he feared. There was Lee's worry for him and her keen awareness of human realities. And there, too, were self-discipline, intelligence, affection, and a richness of experience and thought he expected to draw on for another forty years.

And filling the world, pounding on the walls of existence, the Power. *His* power. He, the master of the world! He who could uproot the trees, spin the earth, make the ground shake and change the colors of the sky.

He felt George's clear-eyed, good-humored tolerance. A hypnotic command triggered in his mind. He saw a Roman Caesar ride in triumph and the slave behind him said, "Caesar, remember you are mortal."

My power? It is a gift from the Fountain of Creation. Mine to use with the wisdom and restraint im-

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planted by my teachers. Or else I'll be destroyed by *my* power.

He laughed and rolled into a cannon ball and hurled his body through the wood.

"Andy! Andy, you're losing us!"

He picked them up and towed them with him. The girl in the beer hall cried in his heart. The fox is many hills away and the hound grows impatient.

They landed in a heap.

George said, "Andy, what the hell are you doing?"

"I brought you down in a soft spot."

"You felt like an elephant running amok! Boy, you've got to be careful. Since you were a little boy I've taught you to watch every move. For a moment I don't think you knew how you felt."

"You're right," Sordman mumbled. "That was close."

"Let's find the picture," Lee said. "Has the drug worn off?"

"Just about. The picture's over by that tree. It feels like it's rumpled up."

After a minute's hunt, they found it. It had been rolled into a ball and tossed away.

"We're dealing with an amateur," Lee said. "A Talent who was even half-developed would have burned this."

Unrolled, the picture fell in half. It had been sliced with a blade.

"Let's walk back," Sordman said. "Let's talk."

They crossed a log bridge. He ran his hands along the rough bark and smelled the cool water of the stream. Most of the big park was wilderness, but here and there were pavilions, an outdoor theatre, open playing fields and beautifully planned gardens. A man could have a home surrounded by the shops and pleasures of civilized living and yet only be a ten-minute elevator ride from God's bounty.

"The fact the killer used the newspaper picture doesn't *prove* Bedler was the real victim," George said. "But it indicates it."

"Let's assume it's true," Sordman said, "and see where it leads us."

"Bedler was married," Lee said. "I remember that from our briefing."

Sordman rabbit-punched a tree as he passed it. "It was a one-year contract, and it ended two weeks ago."

"I smell jealousy," Lee said.

"The world is filled with it," George said. "I favor short-term marriages. They're the only way a person can practice a difficult art and make mistakes without committing himself for life. But about half the mental breakdowns I used to get were due to the insecurities caused by a temporary contract. One party almost always hopes the marriage will somehow become permanent."

"Let's talk to Bedler's ex-wife," Sordman said.

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HER name was Jackie Baker. She was just over five feet tall and blonde. She wore glasses with green frames.

Sordman liked big women but he had to admit this little creature made him feel like swatting and rubbing.

She wore a sea-green kimono and bowed gracefully at the door.

"Citizen Baker, I'm Protector Andrew Sordman. May we talk to you?"

"Certainly, Protector. Welcome."

They entered and he introduced Lee and George. After they exchanged bows, the girl offered them some wine. She took a bottle of clear Rhine wine from the cooler and asked George to open it. There were several journals on a throw table.

"Are you a doctor, Citizen?" Lee asked.

"No, Politician. A medical technician."

They drank the first glass of wine.

"Technician," George said, "we have to ask you some questions. We'll try not to upset you."

The girl closed her eyes. "I'll try not to be upset. I hope you find whoever killed him. I'd like to find her."

The girl felt lonely. She ached with unsatisfied needs. I'd like to lie with you and comfort you, Sordman thought. I'd like to hold you in my arms and drain all the tears you're holding back. But he couldn't. His contract with his wife had six months to run and no one committed adultery any more. "When the rules are carefully tailored to human needs," Lee often said, "there's no excuse for breaking them."

"Why 'her'?" Lee asked. "Why 'her' instead of 'him'?"

The girl looked at Sordman. "Can't you just probe my mind? Do I have to answer questions?"

"I'm afraid so," Sordman said. "My Talent has its limits. I can't deep-probe everybody's mind, any more than a baseball pitcher can pitch all day."

Lee said, "Even if he could, our warrant says we can't probe more than four suspects."

"Now can you tell us why you think the killer is a woman?" George asked.

THE girl held out her glass and George filled it. "Because he was the kind of man who made you want to kill him. He was understanding and loving. He made me feel like a princess all the time I lived with him. But he can't keep to one girl." She gulped down the whole glass. "He told me so himself. He was so wonderful to live with I went insane every time he looked at another girl. I knew he was shopping for his next wife." She wiggled in her chair. "Is that what you want to know?"

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"I'm sorry," Sordman said. "Do you know who he was interested in before he died?"

The girl had big, myopic eyes. "Our contract ended sixteen days ago." She took a cigarette from inside her kimono. "Protector Sordman, could I just talk to you?"

"Certainly," Sordman said.

Lee and George went to a coffee house on the next floor down.

"I want to talk to just you," the girl said. "I feel safe with you. You make me feel right."

"It goes with being a Talent," Sordman said. "Either we like people and let them know it or we crack."

"I know it's all right to tell you things. I love Joe. I broke the rules for him. I didn't avoid him for three months the way you're supposed to. I went everywhere I knew he'd be. I had to see him."

Sordman stroked his beard. Mentally, he cuddled her in his arms and murmured comfort to her.

She hunched her shoulders and wrapped her arms around her body.

"Just before our marriage ended, I found out he was seeing Raven English as much as he could. He didn't break the rules. But when we went to dances he always danced with her once or twice. And she and her husband used to meet us in bars. After the contract expired, he couldn't see her much because she and her husband have another six months to go. But there was a dance last week and I saw the two of them disappear into the park. Raven's husband hunted all over for her. He looked horrible. I pitied him."

"Who's Raven English?"

"She's a sadist. I know she is. She's just the type to do this. She likes to play with men and hurt them. Her poor husband is a nervous wreck. I know she killed Joe, Protector. She hates us!"

He stood up. The girl watched him with big eyes. He put his hand on her head.

"Sleep is a joy," he said.

Unprepared, he couldn't have done that to many people. But she was a woman, which added to his influence, and totally exhausted.

HE got off the vator and looked around for the coffee house. Dozens of people wandered the halls and the shops. As he walked down the hall, some of them looked away or got as far from him as they could. Others ignored him or found his presence reassuring or studied him curiously.

A fat woman in a black kimono walked toward him. She had one hand on her hip and her eyes were narrowed and hard. Sordman smiled. He felt her fear and distrust, and her determination not to let such emotions conquer her.

"Good afternoon, Protector."

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"Good afternoon, Citizen Mother."

He felt her triumph and her pleasure with herself.

His fellow humans often made him gawk in wonder. Some people say we're psychic cripples, he thought. And maybe we are. But we do our work and we enjoy ourselves. And we do dangerous things like putting bases on Venus and falling in love. Surrounded by death and danger, crippled though we are, we go on.

He swelled with feeling. People smiled and glanced at each other or hid shyly from the organ chords of his emotion.

An old man stepped in front of him.

"Monster! Freak!"

He was thin and perfectly dressed. Sordman stopped. God of Infinite Compassion, this is my brother . . .

"They ought to lock you up," the man said. "They ought to keep you away from decent people. Get out of my head! Leave me alone!"

People stared at them. A small crowd gathered. Lee appeared in the door of the coffee house.

"It's all right," Sordman told the people. "It's all right." He started to go on.

The man stepped in front of him. "Leave me alone, freak. Let me think my own thoughts!"

"Citizen, I haven't touched your mind."

"I felt it just then!"

"It was no more than I could help. I'm sorry if I've hurt you."

"Go away!"

"I'm trying to."

"Murderer! Mind witch!"

He was faced with a strong mind that valued its independence. Anything he did would be detected and resented.

"Citizens," he said, "this man deserves your respect. No matter what a man does, he's bound to offend someone. This Citizen values his privacy — which is good — and therefore I make him angry. I hope the good my Talent lets me do outweighs the bad. Forgive me, brother."

He stepped to one side. "Leave him alone," someone said. "Let the Protector work."

"Leave him alone, old man."

"I'm not an old man."

"No, you're not," Sordman said. "I admire your courage." He walked on. Behind him the old man shouted curses.

"Are you all right?" Lee said.

"Sure. Let's go in and sit down."

There were just a few people in the coffee house. Sordman ordered and told them what he had learned.

"I wish you could probe everyone in the building," George said. "All we get is gossip."

"The husband of this Raven English has a motive," Lee said. "Why don't we visit her?"

"I think we should." Sordman

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drank his coffee. "Citizen English herself might have killed them."

"I doubt it," George said.

"It all sounds like a lot of talk," Sordman said. "But we have to follow it up. This business is nothing but wearing out your legs running after every lead. If your legs are strong, you can run anybody down."

They finished their coffee and cigarettes and trudged out.

RAVEN English, one-year wife of Leonard Smith, did not meet them at the door with gracious bows. Instead, a wall panel by the door shot back. They stared at a square of one way glass.

"Who are you?" a girl's voice said.

"I'm Andrew Sordman, your Protector. I come on lawful business. May we enter?"

"No."

"Why not?" Lee asked.

"Because I don't like witches. Keep out."

"We're hunting the killer," Sordman said. "We're on your side. I've taken no drugs and made no preparations. You don't have to be afraid."

"I'm not afraid. I just don't want you in my home."

"You have to let us in," Lee said. "Our warrant gives us entry into every room in this hotel. If we have to break the door down, we can."

"I hope we don't have to break the door down."

"You're getting fat," George said. "You need the exercise."

"You won't break in," the girl said.

Sordman crossed the hall to get a good start. "I'm about to, Mylady." His shoulder filled the doorway behind him. This looks like fun, he thought. He liked to feel his body working.

The door opened. A dark-haired, slender girl stood in the doorway. Her skin was brown and her lips were pink, unpainted flesh. She wore a red kimono.

"All right. Come in."

"Gladly," Sordman said.

It was a three-room apartment, with the kitchen tucked into one wall of the parlor. A painting stood on an easel by the window. The window was a shoulder-high slit and from it, here on the hundred and forty-first floor, he could see across the park to the beach and the rolling Atlantic.

God grant me self-control, he thought. If this is the killer, grant me self-control. He made his savage thoughts lie down and purred at the world.

"I'm sorry we have to force our way in," he said. "And I'm sorry you don't approve of Talent. But please remember two men have died and a little girl may die, too. There are lots of panicky people in the Mark Twain. We've got to find the killer soon and you can help us."

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"Why bother me?" the girl said.

"This is awkward," Lee said. She stood erect but looked past the girl. She felt embarrassed. "Someone told us you and Bedler were seeing each other."

"Oh, quit being prudish," George said. "These things happen all the time." He turned to the girl. "We were told you and Joe Bedler were making plans to get married when your present contract ends."

"That's a lie!"

Sordman laughed in his belly. No matter what the rules were, few women publicly admitted they had broken them. By the standards of the period from 1800 to 1990, the whole marriage system of the Twenty-First Century was immoral; but there were still prudes. And women still preserved the conventions.

"Who told you that?" Raven English said. She frowned. "Was it that Jackie Baker?"

"Why her?" George asked.

"Because she's a logical person for you to talk to and because it's the kind of thing she'd say."

"Yes," Sordman said.

"She ought to see a psycher! And that's why you came?"

"We're not accusing you," Sordman said. "But we've got to follow every lead."

THE girl swore. "Why would I kill Joe? Why are you all suspicious? That's why I hate Talents! All you've done is make everyone suspicious. Everybody's afraid of everybody else."

"Are you an artist?" Sordman asked.

"What?"

"Are you an artist?"

"What's that got to do with it? No, I'm not. My husband paints."

He felt her stall and evade. She would grab at any subject to distract them. He decided he would let his mind probe at random.

"Is he a professional painter?" Lee asked.

"No, he's an engineer. They wouldn't let him go to art school. He's trying to teach himself." She shrugged and ogled the ceiling.

Her emotions said, Men are like that.

"What does your husband think of Talent?" Sordman asked. "Does he share your prejudice?"

"Didn't you meet Len?"

"Where?" He stroked his beard. "Is he the Len downstairs in the beer hall?"

"Of course!"

"I'm afraid I didn't make the connection."

He felt two other minds run like hounds down the same trail.

Lee studied the painting. "Why does your husband hate Talent?"

"Is this a survey?"

Lee grinned. "I'm the lobbyist for the Guggenheim Foundation. Asking that kind of question is a reflex."

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The girl walked around the room. She looked out the window and stretched. Sordman bellowed lust at her flanks and the long curve of her hips.

"Why do men do anything?" Raven yawned. "When he was in Voc school some kid took him in the back room and showed him some tricks. Maybe that did it. Is there a psycher in the house?"

"There is," George said. "Is Citizen Smith an astronautical engineer?"

"You could say so. He works on instruments for space labs."

"That's funny." George stared at the sun flashing on the far-off ocean. "I remember I felt bitter once because I couldn't be a space engineer. I wanted to build rockets and ride to the planets. But the Voc people told me I was too weak in math. So I became a healer of the psyche and I learned my love for rockets was a hunger for power. But still I love the brutes and now I'm an old man I still sometimes wish I'd been an engineer."

"That's too bad," the girl said politely.

"Yes. I suppose your husband feels that way about art?"

"He gets drunk about it sometimes."

"Double motive!" Sordman said.

"One conscious," George said, "plain jealousy. The other half-conscious — resentment. Nobody kills at random. There's always a reason why he took these lives instead of others."

"Plus a lot of self-pity," Lee said, "and I think his wife despises him."

"What are you talking about?" Raven said. "What did you say about me?"

"We think we've got a suspect," Sordman said.

"I didn't do it!"

"I'm going to probe your husband."

"My husband hates Talent."

"We have to hurry," Sordman said. "If your husband's innocent, I'm sorry. We're not saying he's guilty. But I have to examine him."

At the door he paused and thought, God of Infinite Compassion . . . The girl sat down and stared at the wall.

MANY drugs activate the psi powers. The commonest, available in any drug store, is a pill of codeine and half a dried peyote bean. Leonard Smith had both in his pocket when he ran out the side door of the beer hall.

Sordman swore wildly. The girl screamed. The men, the hunters of witches and killers, either froze or shouted and ran to the door. Only John Dyer and two others ran shouting down the hall.

Sordman ran to the door and saw Smith leap into the elevator. He grabbed a wall phone and dialed the Manager's office.

"We've got the killer," he

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shouted. His name's Leonard Smith. He's a young man, dark, wiry, good looking, and he's on the elevator going down."

"We'll get him!"

"Leave him alone! I saw him swallow something as he left. I think he's drugged. Clear the lobby but watch him from hiding. I'll get him before he goes far."

John Dyer trudged back to the beer hall. "Give me your rifle," he told an armed man. Before the man could say anything Dyer snatched the rifle from him.

"All right," Dyer said. "Who's going with me?"

"Hold on," Sordman said. "Where are you going?"

"After Smith."

"I'm going after him. Let him go and I'll have him out cold before an hour's up."

"There isn't anything a rifle can't stop."

Sordman understood. These men were afraid of Talent. But some, like Dyer, had to fight that fear. They had to prove that intelligence and the technical power organized society gives individual men were superior to Talent.

"I can't stop you," Sordman said. "But listen to me. Smith has to be captured alive. The man is insane. He's no more a villain than you or me. He just tampered with a force he couldn't control. You might stop him with a bullet but you'll have to kill him to do it."

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"He killed two of us," a man said.

"He's drugged. He can hide and kill you from a distance."

"So can we," Dyer said. "That's what we do with rifles."

Sordman ran his fingers through his hair. "Stay under cover then. And if I get him pacified, let him live."

THE wall phone buzzed.

"Sordman."

"This is the Manager. He stole a hatchet in the leisure store. He's out in the park."

"Did anybody try to stop him?"

"I cleared the place out."

"Some of your tenants are going after him. Don't let anybody else join them. I wish myself they wouldn't go."

After he hung up the three of them went up a floor and rang the buzzer of a one-tenant apartment. As politely as they could, Lee and George bundled the occupant out.

"I wish you'd let the state police capture him," George said.

"I've got to get to him before they kill him," Sordman said.

"Andy, there are limits to what you can take! Smith has gone berserk. You connect with an insane man and you may shatter all over the place."

Sordman stroked his beard.

"Let him go," Lee said. "Can't you feel he has to do this?"

"Yes, but I won't admit it. I

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trained you, Andy. You're my life's work. I don't want you to wreck yourself."

Sordman nodded soberly. "I know, George. I'll take care of myself." He thought tender thoughts and tried to make them feel how much he loved them.

"Let's go," Lee mumbled. "Come on, George."

He closed the door gently. The window of the apartment overlooked the park. He stared at the thick trees and wondered where Smith was running under that green roof. Then he turned to the picture phone and punched out a number.

The screen lit. It was in full color, praise God.

"Andy!"

His wife smiled when she saw him. She was a big girl with long breasts and full thighs. She wore a dark kimono.

She bowed. "Good afternoon, Husband."

"Good afternoon, Wife." He pressed his palms together and returned the bow.

"Why are you calling, Andy?"

"Because I love you. And I want to ask you a favor, Tina."

"What, Husband?"

"Will you undress for me now?"

"Andy! My, my, my."

He explained the situation to her. "Be careful," she said. "I love you."

"I'll be careful. But I've got to be aware of myself as a physical being. You understand."

She smiled. "May I take my time?"

"Not too long."

She was an uninhibited girl and took great pleasure in displaying herself. Her skin was pure white and her stomach smooth and softly rounded. He could feel the weight of her breasts on his palm.

"God is good," he said.

"Thank you."

His glands flooded his body. His body ached to stroke, squeeze, kiss, penetrate.

"You'd better go," he said. "Before I break the screen down."

She bowed. "Live with God, Husband."

"Live with God, Wife."

THE screen faded. He put on his robe and jabbed the hypodermic into his wrist. Then he knelt to pray.

He did not pray for power. Intelligence and hard work could give him that. He prayed for mercy, compassion, recognition of his own flawed nature. He prayed for courage and the end of fear.

The balls danced between his hands. He sang the Song of Praise, the love song to the world. *Gloria mundi.* Glory in the world, glory in the flesh, glory in the flow of life. Creation is a flow and man a bubble bouncing on the flow. Bubble that will burst but bubble that

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is. Bubble that feels, strives, blends with other bubbles.

Bubble that can fill Creation!

He roared at the walls of existence. His mind yawned and stretched and came awake. He prowled across the woods and parks. Gigantic, he gazed at the mortals who stumbled through the shaded tunnels of the world. These are such as me. These share my doomed existence.

And that one? That one lying in the brush with an axe? That one, preparing to kill, clawing since he was a baby at a world that torments him?

That also is me.

Smith rose to his knees and swung the axe. John Dyer crumpled with a severed spine. The axe swung twice and two men fell. The hunters dropped to their bellies. Rifles cracked. Bullets sang in the grass.

Now they knew they had to kill Smith or die. Now they felt no mercy.

Sordman hovered over them. What he feels, I will feel. His hate will be my hate. His anger mine. His hate must be absorbed in great compassion, in tenderness and rationality. *Or I will be destroyed with him.*

In the room the balls spun and whirled. He lay prostrate on the floor, the yellow bomb-burst on his back. He was afraid. His weakness was naked. He had always known he would someday meet a personality he could not forgive. When that day came he would shatter and flee, like Smith, to any refuge he could make.

"Show your heads! Show your heads and I'll kill you!"

A bullet smashed into Smith's leg. He screamed and flailed the axe. Shouting curses and threats, he crawled through the brush. The hunters crawled after him.

Sordman located Smith. He shuddered as malice bit the edges of his mind. He sang a long note of praise to life.

THEN he opened his mind.

Listen, Smith. I'm your friend. I am Sordman, the Protector of all, of the hunters and the hunted. I come in love. I am Sordman, small brother of the Lord, bubble in the Fountain of Creation ...

Once men had thought a Talent would fell his opponents with a blast of mental energy. It wasn't that easy. Sordman had to find the cause of Smith's hate. He was no rifleman, hurling a blast of energy, but a surgeon probing for the source of a disease.

Two minds tangled. Sordman bore the light of himself into darkness.

— I'll kill you, too. Get out of me. Get out!

Snarl, growl, slash. Two minds linked as one. Sordman fighting Sordman, Smith fighting Smith.

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Aaaaaaaah!

He doubled up on the floor and hugged his knees. The Protector wept and sobbed. Hate! How he hated hate. How he wanted to kill the haters. They clawed his brain, they tortured every moment, and yet he had to love them. *Love them!*

God, grant your servant strength. Be merciful . . .

He had lost his contact but he had to go back. Weak man or not, he had to return or Smith would die.

— I'll kill them all.

He saw the hunters creeping after him. He felt his body's dirty sweat and the blood draining on his leg. Run, said his belly. A hunter fired. He saw a blue morning coat in the bush and felt the gun pointed at his head. Kill!

The axe swung back in his hand. He remembered the swift stroke, the hard resistance of the spine, the joy of having struck and won. I never got to win. They always held me back. My hands wouldn't paint what I told them, my mind wouldn't reach where I wanted to go. When I loved Raven she didn't let me out, she denied me, she made me hold my feelings back. But now I strike! Now I swing an unfettered arm.

Sordman knew what he was joined with now. Smith was what the psycher Talents called an unopened personality. A mind totally absorbed in what things meant to itself. A mind which had not learned to feel the pain and joy of other minds.

Smith's arm had stretched all the way back. He had to act now or someone else would die. He was Sordman the Protector, one of the four best Talents in the world and his powers were running like a river at flood. All he had to do was make the right move.

He linked Smith's mind with the mind of the rifleman.

THE man in the blue morning coat was forty-three years old. He worked in New York City, the assistant manager of a transportation line's local office. His second wife had grown pregnant by accident, which under law meant they were automatically married for life. They had been married for fifteen years and still didn't know each other. His two sons thought he was a spineless old fool who slept all the time and couldn't give them what they needed. He didn't like his job but he knew it was all he would ever do, an exact definition of his limits. Alone in his house, imprisoned by his work, he smoked and slept and ate without appetite.

But now he aimed his rifle and thought, I'll kill the witch. That will be something. I'll know I did that.

The two minds were one. Each

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knew the other's pain, the other's fear. If one died, the other felt his death.

Each recognized the other man's hunger, his frustration, his imprisonment within his body and the limits of his life.

Sordman felt the weight of their lives. He gathered in the strength he called a gift. His voice and mind, his total self, sang the Liturgy of Joy. He gave his feelings and thoughts.

The axe dropped.

The finger squeezed the trigger and the bullet cut the bark from a tree.

His thoughts became a lullaby, a drowsy murmuring of peace and healing sleep.

George and Lee ran from the woods.

"Andy! Don't shoot them. Andy!"

"Where?"

— Here.

He wiggled the leaves and branches of the brush.

— Here!

They stood over the unconscious men. The hunters crept from their hiding spots and joined them.

"We'll bring him in," George said. "A psycher team is on the way."

— Good.

Lee said, "You feel tired, Andy."

— I think they get harder. They take more out of me. Lee?

"What, Andy?"

— It'll never end, will it?

He was a young man speaking to an older person. He had seen much of humanity, but there were things only years could tell.

"Probably not. Is it too much?"

— No.

— TOM PURDOM

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By NEAL BARRETT, JR.

to tell the truth

He didn't have a thing to worry about—if the enemy quizzed him too keenly, he would simply die!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

KEVINSON opened his eyes to bright sunlight streaming through a large window. He looked down at his feet and past them to the foot of the bed. *Bed?* What was he doing in bed? He tried hard to think. White walls white sheets white bed bright sunlight. He sat up with a start. Hospital.

Then he saw the man sitting in the chair beside his bed. Tall, middle-aged, the man had a weather-lined face tanned by some alien sun. He was putting out a cigarette and smiling at Kevinson.

"Good afternoon," he said. "I'm Colonel Griffin, Federation Intelligence. Feel like talking, Major?"

Kevinson looked at the Colonel,

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noted the battle ribbons on his crisply tailored jacket and the double eagles on his shoulder. He lay back down on the soft pillow and closed his eyes. The instant he did, he suddenly remembered. The six red dots coming out of nowhere on the screen, the nerve-jangling clang of battle stations and no time to think, no time to do anything, just punch the button and get the hell out. And after that —

Kevinson grimaced. After that, what?

"Take it easy, Major — you've had a rough time of it," said the Colonel. He gave Kevinson's arm a strong, friendly grip. "You tell me what you can remember and I'll fill you in."

"There isn't much to tell," said Kevinson. "I spotted the Kjard patrol as they came out of sub-drive, punched the random escape pattern and — well, I guess we made it."

Colonel Griffin smiled, lit a cigarette, and held out the pack to Kevinson.

"That's about the way we figured it must have happened," said Griffin. "You got into sub-drive all right, but the Kjard hit you with a stunner first. You and your crew drifted around for two days before we found you. All sleeping like babies."

Kevinson reddened.

"Don't worry about it," grinned the Colonel. "It could happen to anyone. Dealing with the Kjard is tricky business."

"Thank you, sir," said Kevinson. He was suddenly very fond of the friendly Colonel. Not like some of those Intelligence characters. You could trust a man like Colonel Griffin. You could tell him anything. A guy like that had seen action somewhere besides back of a desk.

"Now about your mission," said Griffin, "it was a very important assignment, as you know, Major. And since you won't be up and around for a few days, we'd like to get all we can — you know, fill in for the next crew that goes out. Now let's see, you were to patrol Sector 74 and—"

CLICK!

Kevinson sat up. The sweat was cold under his arms and the blue light hurt his eyes. The thrum of sub-space engines tingled in his legs and there was no white bed, no bright sunlight, no Colonel Griffin.

Kevinson felt sick. Then he felt nothing.

MARSHAL Ftel sat behind his desk with his eyes half closed and his thick arms crossed over his furry chest. Adjutant Nvec stood at attention before him. The Adjutant looked a little like a tall grizzly bear that had been left out in the rain too long. He was younger than Marshal Ftel and his pelt was still a pale silky blue.

Nvec made a gentle mumbling

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sound in his throat and the Marshal opened his eyes and glowered.

"I am not sleeping, Nvec. It is not necessary to make noises."

"Yes, sir," said Nvec. "I have the reports, sir."

"Then read them to me."

"Yes, sir. Major Kevinson lasted one minute and sixteen seconds under illusion. Then—"

"Then," said Ftel sourly, "you came right out and asked him what his mission was and he blacked out." Ftel turned his cold red eyes on Adjutant Nvec. "Don't you have any finesse, Nvec?

"Sir," stammered Nvec, "it's very seldom an officer talks under illusion. We—"

"All right, Nvec, don't tell me things I am aware of already. Get on with your report."

Nvec cleared his throat and continued. "Sir, report from Neural Examination is as follows: Kevinson was born in—"

Ftel's great fist slammed down on his desk. "For Trec's sake, I don't want to hear another Terran life history! Dog named Rover or Spot, check? Kissed the girl next door at fifteen, check? Now get on with it! What did you find on him? What have I got to work with?"

Ftel fumed and settled his huge bulk lower in his chair.

NVEC leafed through his papers and began to read again. "One nerve-deadener control in base of spine just below skin, hidden beneath mole. Control contained built-in breaking-point circuit with confession-selector timer and 478 separate pain-level nodes. We found four more nerve control centers over his body, two obvious fakes, and others interconnected on a random circuit efficient up to twelve levels of standard psychic interrogation." Nvec took a deep breath and turned a page. "We also found six micro-transmitter grids, one very well hidden between two layers of toenail tissue."

"Ridiculous," grunted Ftel in annoyance.

"Sir?"

"Go on."

"Yes, sir. There were fourteen dummy pain neutralizers, six very easy to detect, three medium-well hidden, three very secure, two which we almost missed."

And a dozen more, thought Ftel sourly, that you'll probably never find. Oh, for the days of rack and thumbscrew.

"In the brain," Nvec went on, "we have uncovered and dug through or bypassed 87 neural blocks with interlocked variations. Also 36 cover alternates, with corresponding backgrounds, personalities and missions."

Nvec stopped.

Marshal Ftel looked up. "Is that all? Nothing besides the standard equipment?"

"Well, sir, there are the usual in-

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dications. But with their delicate neural structures, we don't dare dig any deeper."

"No," growled Ftel, "not ordinarily. But this time we've got to try. Headquarters has an idea there's something big going on. Crucial point of the war and all that sort of thing. If the Terrans are up to something in this sector, we'd better find out what it is." He studied Nvec from under silvery brows. "I'm sure you don't relish the thought of your mates receiving a package with your pelt in it any more than I do, Nvec."

"No, sir." Nvec swallowed. "What do you suggest, sir?"

"Use the psycher and see if you can find any more deep-set indications that we can get to. I know they can implant a block lower than the levels indicated by your report."

Nvec nodded.

"But be careful," warned Ftel. "Remember the suicide circuit. Cut through that with the wrong frequency and that's it. He's no good to us dead or insane."

Nvec saluted and lumbered toward the door.

"And Nvec—"

"Sir?"

"Remember, if the fur flies on this deal, we all get tanned." He paused and raised a pudgy finger. "But you first, Adjutant."

Nvec saluted nervously and softly closed the door.

Ftel glanced at the pile of reports on his desk, mumbled a low obscenity to himself, and pulled a bottle of Bvorlta from his pouch. In the female Kjard, the pouch was used for carrying young. The male Kjard had long ago found other, more practical uses.

KEVINSON was well aware he was being run through the Kjardian mill, and doubly aware there wasn't a thing he could do about it. The Corps spent approximately $40,000 per officer preparing for just such an event, and now it was up to his mental blocks, psychic torture adjusters, confession nodes and whatever else they had in him to do the job.

Kevinson's mind below the primary and secondary levels was now a complete blank, both to Kevinson himself and, with luck, to the Kjard. The answers he would give, or had already given, came to his conscious mind from a source over which he had no control.

The war with the Kjard was now in its eighth year. Space maneuvers were intricate operations, involving tremendous expenditures of time, materiel, men and money. Once a fleet was committed to action, it was a gargantuan task to pull it out and unwind its complex coordinates and divert it in a new and doubly complex direction. If there was anything left to divert.

As the war progressed, prisoner

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interrogation methods improved, and counter-interrogation became a fine art. The $40,000 worth of neural implants was considered well worth the expense if an officer could be kept from revealing the maneuvers of a 40-billion-dollar operation.

Of course, the cost of training every crewman was prohibitive. The Federation and the Kjard solved this problem by simply keeping their crewmen in the dark about everything not connected with their immediate duties. This suited the crewmen fine. When captured, they told all they knew about military matters—which was nothing.

The officers had much the same reassurance; they knew they wouldn't be physically tortured, and they knew they couldn't talk.

There was only one hitch. Counter-Interrogation tried to keep up with new developments, but defense and offense seldom overlap. If you happened to be unlucky enough to be captured at the wrong stage of this game — tough. When they probed within range of your secret, a little alarm went off somewhere in your built-in circuits and a switch closed before the information could be extracted. The suicide circuit.

And that, thought Kevinson as they strapped him down again, was something to think about.

Marshal Ftel stood in the background with Adjutant Nvec. They were watching Group Seven in a series of twelve tests designed to bypass the suicide circuit of Major Kevinson and bring his information up to an extractable level. Ftel had taken a very personal interest in the Kevinson tests. Confirming information indicated that Kevinson had almost certainly been captured while scouting for a major Federation breakthrough. Ftel was taking every precaution to keep his own pelt in one piece. Kevinson's unmanned ship continued to send routine reports back to Federation headquarters. Every detail, every scrap of information collected from the vital sectors involved was filtered and sifted through Ftel's office. But Kevinson himself was the key — if he couldn't be broken, the rest of the information was worthless.

"What are they doing now?" asked Ftel impatiently.

"Sir, they are testing to discover the type of suicide circuits that have been planted in Kevinson. If they can isolate the method in which his system will be destroyed—"

"I know, I know," snapped Ftel. "I mean *what* area are they working on?"

"The stomach tissue, sir. If you recall, sir, Area Nine lost a lieutenant two weeks ago when a virus in his stomach mutated as we made contact."

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"They're *still* testing for *that?* Federation's probably changed the circuit a dozen times in two weeks!" Ftel turned on Nvec, raising a hairy paw to the Adjutant's Face. "Fumble this for me and you won't see another shedding season." He turned and stalked out of the room, feeling to see if the bottle of Bvorlta was still in his pouch.

Kevinson was conscious of what was being done to him, but he refused to let it bother him. Or, rather, certain circuits told him it didn't bother him, which was just as good, if not better.

He knew, for instance, that the Kjard were probing his stomach with sonic scalpels, and he could feel the wave pulsations running through his body. One certain note made his teeth ache. He hoped the suicide circuit wasn't in his teeth.

One of the Kjard grinned, revealing a set of strong white molars. "Don't worry," he said. "We already checked the teeth."

Kevinson glanced up. The Kjard wore earphones and evidently had the dull job of monitoring Kevinson's primary thoughts.

"Thanks," thought Kevinson, *"you overgrown, smelly slob."*

The Kjard flushed.

"I THINK," said Marshal Ftel, "that we are finally getting somewhere, Nvec."

Nvec smiled broadly. "I certainly hope so, sir."

Ftel frowned. "Get overconfident, though, and we'll pull some fool trick like Gtem, in Area Four." He bent over the reports again.

Nvec shuddered. He had read the official report on the late Marshal Gtem, who had somehow let a two-cluster Federation Admiral die under the probe.

"Sir?" asked Nvec.

"Hmmm?" Ftel didn't look up.

"Sir, what happens to a Federation officer who — makes mistakes — big mistakes, sir?"

"Like Gtem made, you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Gtem's Adjutant?"

"Yes, sir," said Nvec.

Ftel looked up. "They get promoted, Nvec."

"Sir?"

"I believe the Terran term is 'kicked upstairs.' And don't ask me to explain it to you." Ftel bent over his work again.

"Yes, sir," said Nvec, who was so engrossed in the wonders of alien psychology that he forgot to salute as he left.

Kevinson was being wheeled down the long corridor again. By now, he had lost all count of the number of times he had gone from the tiny room, down the hall, and into the examining chamber. Any estimate of the elapsed time since his capture would have to include periods under sedation, narcohyphosis, dream-sleep, subsonic suspension and a number of other

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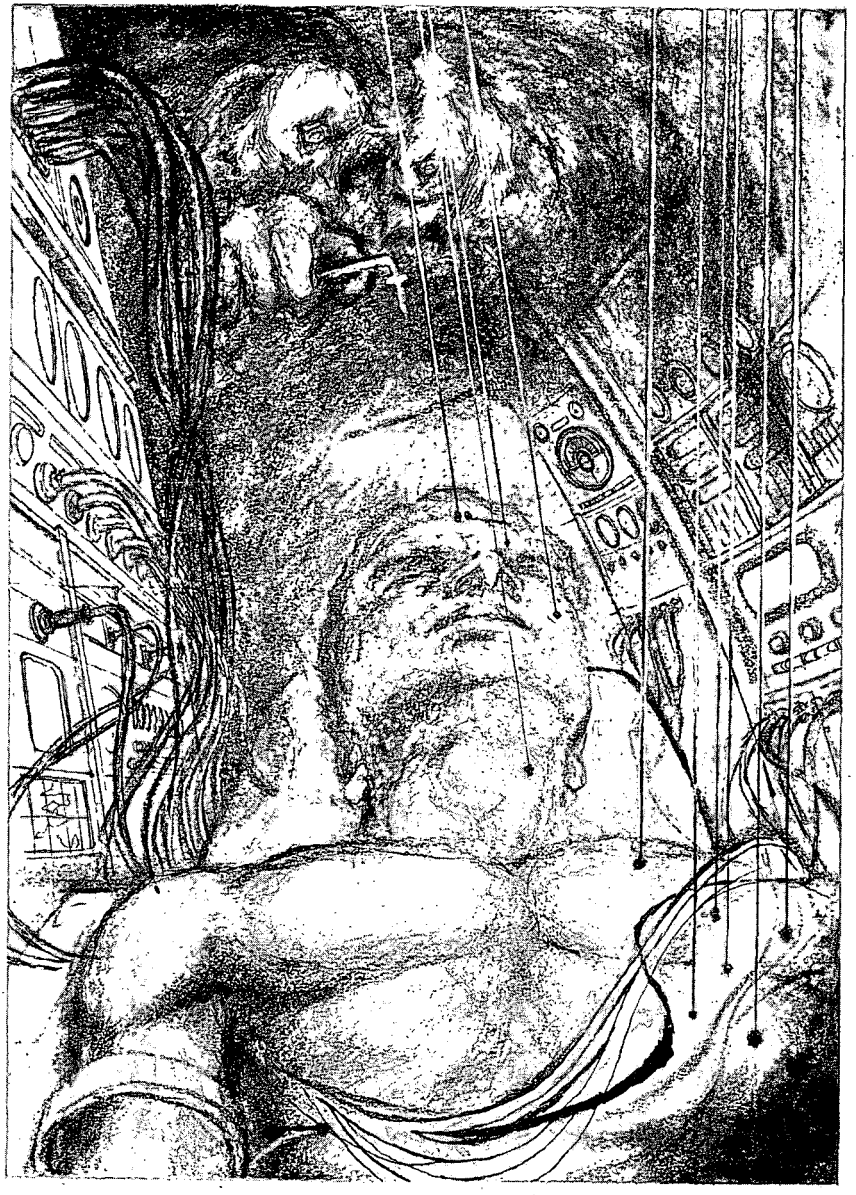

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states that can only be described as variations on semi-consciousness and pseudo-death.

As far as Kevinson was concerned, anywhere from thirty seconds to ten thousand years had swept dreamily by.

At present, he was aware of two things. The pale blue Kjard lighting was giving him a headache again, as it always did when he was conscious enough to realize he had a head. Secondly, he was dimly aware that there was entirely too much activity going on for a regular examination period. The corridor was literally swarming with Kjard officers and technicians.

One Kjard in particular seemed to express a keen interest in him. Kevinson had never seen him before, at least not that he could remember, but he rocognized the silver triple-spangled shoulder insignia as the badge of a full Marshal of Interrogation.

As they reached the examination chamber, it was the Marshal himself who put the blinder helmet over Kevinson's eyes. The helmet was only used during certain phases of the examination, and Kevinson hadn't yet decided whether it was to keep the patient from seeing what was being done to him out of kindness or for security reasons.

While Kevinson was being readied for examination, Marshal Ftel took the opportunity to inspect the interrogation equipment. There was no reason for a Marshal to inspect the equipment personally, but Ftel knew the technicians expected it of him, and would lose respect for him if he failed to find a spot of grease or a bit of dust.

Ftel had been in the business long enough to know that a satisfied officer might well expect to wake up some morning with his pelt nailed to a bulkhead.

FROM the far wall of the examination chamber, a thirty-foot bank of gleaming bronze-colored instruments circled in an arc around the central examining table. The table was joined to the bank by a tangled snarl of multicolored cable which occasionally bypassed the bank itself to join other instruments placed at random on the walls, floor and even the ceiling. At the beginning of the war, the examination chamber had been a neat and orderly place to work in; now it resembled a weird organism that had not quite made up its mind what it wanted to be when it grew up. Of necessity, the chamber was in a constant state of flux, a desperate race to adapt to new developments of the enemy as well as the efforts of their own technicians.

The miles of cable, tons of tubes, transistors, switches and just plain gadgets were being readied for what Ftel believed to be the most

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important job they would ever perform: the extraction of vital information from the mind of Major Kevinson. For weeks, the technicians had worked around the clock for this moment. First, the various primary level mental and physical protective and confusion blocks were removed. Then, and more carefully, the secondary probes went after the subtler devices. Here the danger to Kevinson, and indirectly to the Kjard, became acute. A hasty probe or a mistaken analysis and the suicide circuit could bring the examination to a deathly halt. During this phase, Marshal Ftel's pelt itched constantly, and his supply of Bvorlta ran alarmingly low.

Adjutant Nvec lumbered up to Ftel and huffed smartly to attention. "Sir, we are ready to begin."

Ftel paused, his eyes on the Terran strapped to the examining table. Then he nodded to Nvec.

Kevinson was aware of being questioned. Whether the voice came from inside or out of his head, though, was impossible to tell.

"Kevinson," said the voice, "you will be asked several questions. You will answer them all with one word: True. You will answer in this manner until otherwise instructed. Do you fully understand what you are to do?"

Kevinson answered, "Yes, fully."

"Your name is Bruce B. Kevinson?"

"True."

"You hold the rank of Major in the Federation Forces?"

"True."

"Your serial number is KH-77590933?"

"True."

"A man can live on the face of the sun?"

"True."

"A man can breathe in space without benefit of a protective suit?"

"True."

The questioner paused. Glancing at the lighted panel by his side, he noted that Kevinson's test questions had all been answered as they should be. The bank of lights also indicated that Kevinson realized the last two answers should have been False. The questioner nodded to his assistants and more switches were thrown into play. New banks of lights flickered on and off, and the emergency organ bank next to Kevinson's body hummed into life.

Ftel could feel the moisture creep up under his pelt. The organ bank meant they were ready to proceed to third level probing. Here they would certainly come up against the suicide circuit and, if successful, disarm it. If any organ in Kevinson's body were destroyed in the process, they would attempt to keep him alive by cutting in a duplicate organ from the bank.

And, Ftel uneasily thought, probably unsuccessfully. The sui-

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cide circuit was usually too quick and too thorough; likely to set off half a dozen alternate circuits before the organ bank could take control.

AN hour later, Kevinson was no longer conscious of existing. The protective devices left in his mind and body had taken complete control in a last-ditch effort to guard the thoughts deep within his brain.

"Circuit TG," said the head technician.

"Activated."

"Begin probe in Area V."

"Easy!"

"Give me a check on that. We hit something."

"There . . . Now!"

Kevinson's mind reacted to the shock of the probe with all its available weapons. Two shields were penetrated, and then another. As the probe delicately pushed through to the fourth, a green light buzzed and blinked frantically on the control panel.

The Kjard technician hastily withdrew. His pelt was soaked and his paws shook. "We nearly did it. That was the suicide circuit."

His assistant frowned in disbelief. "The circuit? In conjunction *with* the shield?"

"Something new, all right. Call the Marshal over here."

Ftel and Nvec hastily joined the technicians at the table.

"What is it?" said Ftel. "What's wrong?"

"We've hit a barrier with a suicide circuit implanted in a field around it. If we try to break through, we'll set it off. If we don't break through, we'll never get anything. I feel sure the shield we're after is a major block."

Ftel bit his lip and scowled. Surrounding a shield with a circuit was something the Kjard or the enemy were bound to come up with eventually. Now it was here.

Ftel cursed under his breath and turned to the head technician. "You're convinced it's a major block?"

"Yes, sir. I'm almost certain it's *the* major block."

"Hmmm. That means we can't bypass it."

"Not to any advantage, sir."

"Go ahead and try. We can't do anything else," grunted Ftel.

The technician nodded grimly. His assistant shrugged and began.

Kevinson's mind screamed in agony and fought back with savage force. The probe penetrated the suicide circuit and began to implode.

"He's gone!" hissed the technician.

"No. Wait."

"He's gone, I tell you! We set it off!"

"No, by Trec, we stopped it!"

"It won't hold long! Disarm, quickly!"

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A moment later, the head technician nodded to Ftel and sank weakly to a chair.

Ftel reached in his pouch and, to Nvéc's everlasting astonishment, brought out a bottle of Bvorlta and offered it to the Adjutant.

The rest was routine. Kevinson came slowly out of shock, his mind naked and open, stripped bare of protection. The first horrifying thing he remembered was his mission. Then the voice went to work. "Your instructions, please, Major Kevinson."

Kevinson answered without hesitation. There was no way he could stop himself now. "I am a Sector Scout for Federation Battle Fleets XII, XXVI, XVIII, XLI and XLV."

"Great Stars," whispered Ftel, "I knew it! A major attack force!" He could almost feel the new silver cluster on his shoulder.

Kevinson talked. He talked about the fleet coordinates, he talked about rendezvous sectors, he talked about the armament of each individual class of vessel, he talked about any and every item the Kjard wished to know. And when it was over, and he was wheeled out of the chamber and back toward his room, Kevinson broke. Now there were no protective devices to ward off his apprehensions and fears. Now, although he had been helpless to stop himself, he had talked. And he knew it.

Ftel watched Kevinson disappear down the pale blue hall. A wide grin spread across his furry jaws.

TWO months after the battle, Interrogation Marshal Ftel stared sullenly at the wall aboard the Federation Prison Ship *Bat Masterson*. He was uncomfortable, in spite of the fact that his rank entitled him to sit near the only air shaft.

"Hello, Marshal Ftel."

Ftel started and looked up. A tall man in Federation blues stood above him. Ftel cringed.

"Kevinson," he said. "How nice of you to drop in." Adjutant Nvec looked on, his furry jowls hanging wide.

"I heard you were aboard," said Kevinson, "so I thought I'd say hello."

"Thank you," said Ftel.

"I thought you'd like to know—"

"I already know," mumbled Ftel. "It was a simple, ridiculous plan that anyone could have seen through. So it worked, naturally. Since you couldn't lie to us, you did the next worse thing — you told us the truth."

"Or rather," added Kevinson, "what I was *told* was the truth."

Ftel's shoulders drooped heavily. "I'm not a Fleet Admiral. If Headquarters acts on my information, that's their business."

"Anything you need?" asked Kevinson.

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"Yes," said Ftel, "a drink."

"Sorry," grinned Kevinson. "But I will see if I can get these lights dimmed." Ftel murmured his thanks.

Later, Nvec turned to Marshal Ftel. "Sir?"

"What is it?"

"Sir," said Nvec, "I've been wondering. I noticed Major Kevinson has been promoted to Colonel, and you said the Federation, as you put it, kicked its officers upstairs when they made mistakes — big mistakes."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Marshal Ftel.

— NEAL BARRETT, JR.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

You know, people living in a Golden Age never are aware that they are, except in retrospect, and then only by contrast. Maybe those contrasts shouldn't happen to a dog, but they don't last forever, and it takes a spell of them, it seems, to make the superlative the highest one can attain, not the least one will settle for What topples Golden Ages? More than anything else, perhaps, it's the hopeless job of trying to greaten greatest into greatester, greatestest, and on from there. Cases in point are such masterworks as *Gravy Planet*. No, Virginia, they didn't win instant acclaim. Instant yelps and welts is what they raised. When the howling ceased — the things were unfamiliar, you see, and had to be lived with a while to lose their dangerous aspects, the danger being new ideas—*then* they emerged as masterpieces. *Gravy Planet* is chosen as the prime example because Frederik Pohl's DRUNKARD's WALK is sure to be compared unfavorably with it by at least one terribly tired, terribly disenchanted reviewer, though Pohl's mastery is far more mature, sure, complete, than in the earlier story.

For we are at the beginning of another Golden Age, in which Pohl and other gladly welcomed old masters welcome as gladly as we do the appearance of vital, vigorous new talents to the 1960s.

The names are unfamiliar, but only for now: William W. Stuart, Allen Kim Lang, Neal Barrett, Jr., Jim Harmon, R. A. Lafferty — it's a long, exciting list that goes on and on.

Where were they all this while? Serving their apprenticeships, honing their talents, building writing muscles, getting ready for the big time . . . and it's here. GALAXY, ending its tenth year, is going into its next decade with a Golden Age. This could be the first in the history of man that's recognized as such, and not only in retrospect, but while it's going on. Not a chance? Stick around and see!

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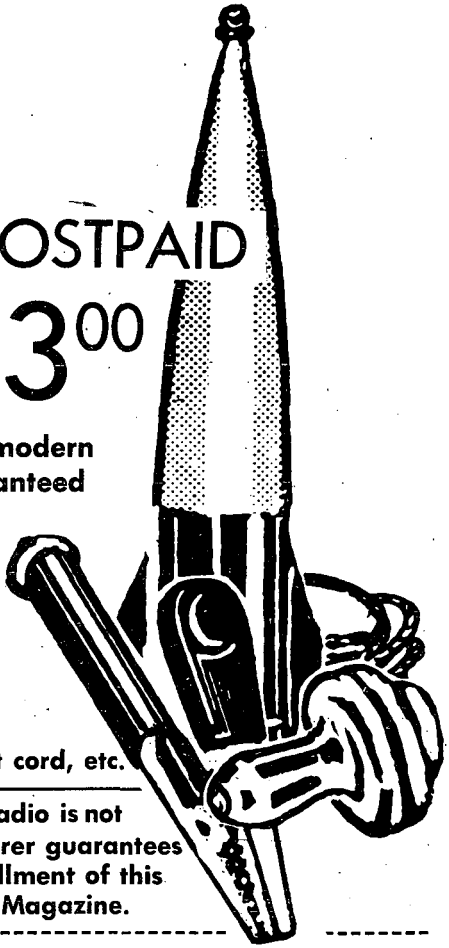

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

A TREASURY OF GREAT SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Anthony Boucher. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., $5.95 for two volumes.

A DOUBLE-BARRELED uniquity, this nevertheless needs individual treatment. Each volume has *two* full-length novels, a couple of novellas, some novelettes and some shorts.

Volume One has Wyndham's excellent *Rebirth* and van Vogt's intricate *Weapon Shops of Isher* as novel attractions. The two novellas are "The (Widget), the (Wadget) and Boff," a big bit of Sturgeon, and Heinlein's famous "Waldo." Novelettes: "Pillar of Fire," typically off-trail Bradbury, and the haunting "Children's Hour" by Kuttner and Moore. Best of the shorts are "Gomez" by Kornbluth and "The Father-Thing" by Phillip K. Dick.

Despite weak sisters, the total of superior wordage is high.

Rating: ****

VOLUME TWO: Two exceptional novels are highlights, *Brain Wave* by Poul Anderson and *The Stars My Destination,* a GALAXY classic by Alfred Bester.

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"The Man Who Sold the Moon," Heinlein's big novella about a latter-day Promised Land and its Moses, is the longest of the remaining yarns. Provocative is a pale word to describe "The Lost Years," Oscar Lewis's novelette about Lincoln's declining years after his recovery from his near-assassination.

Top-notch shorts are "Letters from Laura" by Mildred Clingerman and "The Morning of the Day They Did It" by E. B. White.

Boucher allowed himself too much latitude with the other material to justify the "Great" in his title. Lord knows he had enough to pick from.

Rating: ****

THE MARTIAN MISSILE by David Grinnell. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.95

GRINNELL, STRIVING for the shock effect of unleashed imagination, succeeds instead in creating a comic strip without pictures.

His tarnished hero, holing up from the law in Arizonia, rescues an alien from the wreckage of its space vehicle. Before death, the alien implants a message in his host's arm bone plus a compulsion to deliver the message to Pluto. To insure delivery, the hero, unlike children, will be seen but not noticed.

With this handy attribute, the ex-con reaches Russia unnoticed, tossing test animals from its moon missile to make room for himself. Now the tale starts to get a bit confusing. Another set of invaders mixes in. There's a rescue from Mars in a fossil space craft, and an escape from Jupiter, quick-frozen in a plastic projectile fired from a titanic cannon.

Rating: **

THE BIRD OF TIME by Wallace West. Gnome Press, Inc., Hicksville, N. Y., $3.50

WEST'S HIGHLY palatable fairy tale achieves its highest degree of success with Part One, the account of the First and Second Martian Expeditions and the brawl leading directly to war between the planets. In this section, the author tells his story of the Martians, a winged, angelic-looking race, slowly dying for lack of power and raw materials. Their outwitting of a would-be Peter Minuit who attempts a repeat of the twenty-four-dollar Manhattan Island swindle is a delight.

The remainder of the book, though quick-paced and deftly written, is all downhill from the peak reached by Part One.

Rating: ***½

THE GLORY THAT WAS by L. Sprague de Camp. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.95

FOR MOST of de Camp's yarn,

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it is debatable whether his two trepid travelers have actually gone back to Classical Periclean Greece or whether the Golden Age has come forward to the twenty-seventh century Present of the story.

De Camp's neat puzzle derives from the braving of the puppet emperor's force screen about modern Greece by a magazine reporter and the bereft husband of a kidnapped wife. Their shipwreck occurs in ancient Greece — or does it?

Robert A. Heinlein's foreword points out that the wellspring of de Camp's humor is the human quality of his characters. Heroes and villains alike are bumblers and never drawn bigger than life. So, though there isn't a belly-laugh in the book, there are plenty of chuckles and unostentatious erudition.

Rating: ***

THE EATER OF DARKNESS by Robert M. Coates. Putnam Capricorn Books, N. Y., $1.15

COATES' INTRODUCTION acknowledges his intimate acquaintance with the Paris of the Twenties and its fabulous inhabitants: Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Picasso, Satie, etc. In those days, for a book to sell well denoted failure of a sort. So, thirty-odd years after its original satisfactorily limited success, Putnam's reprint is now risking failure of a sort.

Since murders are committed from afar by an undetectible X-ray Bullet, there is no doubt that the story is also science fiction of a sort, even though it has been called the first surrealist novel in English.

Coates' manipulation of language and plot are often amusing, often irritating, always fascinating.

Rating: ****

THE SEA PEOPLE by Adam Lukens. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.95

A SONG title of yesteryear, "Imagination Is Funny," is descriptive of the above book — funny-peculiar and unconsciously funny-comical. However, a reasonable doubt of the author's guilt does exist. Numerous clues point to the possible butchery of a larger, less episodic, less pathetic work, hacked away at to fit into a too-small container. If so, it would be a mercy to author and reader if someone published the original book.

Rating: *

THE ODIOUS ONES by Jerry Sohl. Rinehart & Co., Inc., N. Y., $2.95

THE READER who is able to put this book down should find breaking the smoking habit easy. Sohl has written an excellent how-did-it, well paced, crisply dialogued and mounting terror.

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A tiny college alumnus group, the Forty Two Club, is at the core of the action. Following their 17th annual shindig, one of the wealthiest, best-adjusted members of the group of seven commits suicide by walking into the ocean. During the last week of his life, he unaccountably had generated either blind fear or maniacal hatred in anyone near him, even including his own wife and son, but without undergoing any noticeable personality change.

With the equally unlikely suicide of another member, it becomes obvious that the group is being plagued — but by whom, why — and, most important of all, how?

A sweet setup. One more revision of the ending probably would have added the extra star that the story deserved and should have gotten.

Rating: ***½

JUNIOR EDUCATON CORNER

WORDS OF SCIENCE by Isaac Asimov. Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, $5.00

REALM OF NUMBERS by Isaac Asimov. Houghton, Mifflin, $2.75

ASIMOV has a rare talent. He can make your mental mouth water over dry facts.

Words, designed primarily to dispel the layman's fear of weighty terminology, holds perhaps the greater interest. What an odd switcheroo that we use the Arabic "al koh'l" for alcohol — while the Arabs borrowed "spir'ts" from us!

Numbers is a bit rougher going in its step-by-step approach to modern mathematics. Starting with finger counting, it ends with the mind-cracking concept of infinite series of infinite series of endlessnesses.

RELATIVITY FOR THE LAYMAN by James A. Coleman. The MacMillan Co., N.Y., $3.50

PROF. COLEMAN maintains that Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity are not in themselves too difficult. Rather, the consequences of the deceptively simple formulae are the conceptual troublemakers.

With the aid of his own whimsically humorous drawings, he ably manages to bring Einstein's titanic concepts down to understandable size.

SPECTRUM, edited by Ray Ginger. Henry Holt & Co., N. Y., $3.95

THIS BEAUTIFUL volume is a studied approach to "The World of Science." Tremendously broad in scope, its contents page is evolved from that of a general science magazine. Articles run all the way from building Brook-

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lyn Bridge to William James on the Stream of Consciousness.

The illustrations are truly striking. The simplest-looking is a splendid microphoto of platinum atoms. The most complex-looking is a set of tranparent pages showing successive layers of organs of a dissected frog.

PAPERBACK NEWS

ACE BOOKS: *Solar Lottery*, Philip K. Dick, 35¢. Civilization as based on randomness and the Games Theory . . . *Starhaven* by Ivar Jorgenson and *The Sun Smasher* by Edmond Hamilton, Ace Double, 35¢. Crimedom's brave new world; Hamilton's tale of an unknowing exile from his own planet . . . *Rocket to Limbo* by Alan E. Nourse and *Echo in the Skull* by John Brunner, Double, 35¢. Good interstellar exploration by Nourse; intrigue against humanoids by alien parasites . . . *Fire in the Heavens* by George O. Smith and *Masters of Evolution* by Damon Knight, Double, 35¢. Smith's sun threatens novacide; Knight's superior story originally known as "Natural State" when printed in these pages . . . *Journey to the Center of the Earth* by Jules Verne, 35¢. From the picture of the same name . . . *First to the Stars* by Rex Gordon, 35¢. Problems of first contact with an extra terrestrial civilization.

SIGNET BOOKS: *No Time for Tomorrow* by Brian Aldiss, 35¢. These 12 yarns prove Aldiss a genuine topnotcher . . . *The Other Side of the Sky* by Arthur C. Clarke, 35¢. A double dozen of Clarke's best short-shorts, all tricky.

CREST BOOKS: *No Place on Earth* by Louis Charbonneau, 35¢. Credibly incredible revolt against a fierce dictatorship . . . *The Star of Life* by Edmond Hamilton, 35¢. A stellar search for the Fountain of Youth.

BALLANTINE BOOKS: *Wolfbane* by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, 35¢. Their fine 1957 GALAXY Novel . . . *The Fourth "R"* by George O. Smith, 35¢. A five-year-old machine-taught genius fights society for survival . . . *Seed of Light* by Edmund Cooper, 35¢. A well-written if unstartling starship story . . . *The Outward Urge* by John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes, 35¢. A heroic dynasty that won't keep its feet on the ground . . . *Star Science Fiction No. 6* edited by Frederik Pohl, 35¢. Eight new stories.

GOLD MEDAL: *Four from Planet 5* by Murray Leinster, 35¢. Earth invaded by children from Earth.

— FLOYD C. GALE

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an elephant for the prinkip

BY L. J. STECHER, JR.

A Delta class freighter can carry anything—maybe more than its skipper can bear!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

A DELTA class freighter isn't pretty to look at, but it can be adapted to carry most anything, and occasionally even to carry it profitably. So when I saw one I didn't recognize sitting under the gantry at Helmholtz Spaceport, I hurried right over to Operations.

It looked as if I might be able to get my Gasha root off-planet before it started to spoil, after all.

It was the *Delta Crucis*, they told me. She was a tramp, and she hadn't yet been signed for a cargo. The skipper was listed as his own agent. They told me where they thought I could find him, so I drifted over to the Spaceport bar, and looked around.

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I found my man quickly enough. He had the young-old look of a deep spacer. He wore a neat but threadbare blue uniform, with the four broad gold rings of command —rather tarnished—on each sleeve. He had a glass of rhial — a liquor that was too potent for my taste— in front of him at ten o'clock in the morning, and that wasn't a good sign. But he looked sober enough.

So I picked up a large schooner of beer at the bar and strolled over to his table in the far corner away from the window.

"Mind if I join you?" I asked casually. "I hate to drink alone."

He stared at me for a minute out of those pale-blue spacer's eyes of his, until I figured he thought he had me catalogued.

Then he motioned me to the chair across from his at the small table. We sat for a few minutes in silence, sizing each other up.

"That's a mighty nice looking freighter out there on pad seven," I said at last. "Yours?"

HE uncapped his glass, took a sip of rhial, snicked the cover back, and let the heady stuff evaporate in his mouth. He breathed in sharply in the approved manner, but he didn't even shudder. He just nodded slowly, once.

That appeared to pass the conversational ball back to me. "I might have a cargo for you, if you can handle it," I said. "I hear these Delta class ships can manage almost anything, but this is a rough one. The *Annabelle* is the only ship in the area built to take my stuff, and she's grounded with transposer troubles."

He cocked one sandy eyebrow at me. I interpreted this to be a request for the nature of my cargo, so I told him, and let him ponder about it for a while.

"Gasha root," he said at last, and nodded once. "I can handle it. That'll be easy, for *Delta Crucis*. Like you said, she can handle anything. Her last cargo was a live elephant."

We completed our deal without much trouble. He drove a hard bargain, but a fair one, and he had plenty of self-confidence. He signed a contingent-on-satisfactory-delivery contract, and that's unusual for a ship that's handling Gasha. Hadn't thought I'd be so lucky. Gasha is tricky stuff.

We went over to the Government office to complete the deal — customs arrangements, notarizations, posting bonds and so forth — but we finally signed the contract, all legal and binding. His name turned out to be Bart Hannah.

Then, by unspoken consent, we went back to the bar.

It was after noon, by that time, so I had a Scotch, and then I had

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another. I was so relieved to have found a ship for my cargo that I didn't even think about lunch.

I GOT more and more mellow and talkative as time went by, but the skipper just sat there, breathing rhial. He didn't seem to change a bit.

Something had been bothering me, though, and I finally figured out what it was. So I stopped talking about my farming troubles, and asked Captain Hannah a direct question.

"You say you carried an *elephant?*" I asked. "A *live* elephant? In a *space ship?*"

He nodded. "It's an animal," he said. "A very large animal. From Earth."

"I know all about that," I said. "We're civilized here. We're not just a bunch of back-planet hicks, you know. We study all about the Home Planet at school. But why — and how — would anyone take an elephant into space?"

He stared at me for a while, then took a deep breath, and let it out slowly. "I'll tell you," he said. "After all, it's nothing to be really ashamed of." He pondered for a full minute. "It all started just a few standard months ago, on Condor — over in Sector Sixty-four W."

"Sixty-four W?" I broke in. "That's clear over on the other side of the Galaxy."

He looked at me for awhile, and then went on just as if I hadn't spoken.

"I'd been doing all right with *Delta Crucis,*" he said, "and salting away plenty of cash, but I wasn't satisfied. It was mostly short-haul stuff — ten or twenty light years — and it was mostly run-of-the-mill loads. Fleeder jewels, kharran, morab fur — that sort of thing, you know. I was getting bored. They said a Delta class freighter could carry just about anything, and I wanted to prove it. So when I heard that a rich eccentric, one planet out, on Penguin, might have an interesting job for me, I flitted right over.

"The Prinkip of Penguin wasn't just rich. He was *rich* rich. Penguin has almost twice the diameter of this planet, but it's light enough to have about the same surface gravity. To give you an idea, its two biggest bodies of water are about the size of the Atlantic Ocean, back on the Earth you've studied so much about. On Penguin they call them lakes. And the Prinkip owns the whole planet — free and clear. I should be so lucky with *Delta Crucis.*

"THE Prinkip is a little skinny man, but that doesn't keep him from having a large-size hobby to go with his large-size planet. The Prinkip collects animals — one from each planet in his sector.

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He had a zoo with nearly three hundred monsters in it — always a sample of the largest kind from whatever planet it came from.

"He showed me around. It was the damndest sight you ever saw. He had one animal called a pfleeg. It was almost two hundred feet long; it walked around on two legs and sang like a bird. He had another one that had two hundred and thirty-four legs on a side. I counted them. It had four sides. Didn't care which one was up. He had animals under glass that didn't breathe at all. He had one animal under a microscope that was about a thousandth of an inch long, but he told me that it was the biggest one on Fartolp. He had a big satellite stuck up overhead in a one-revolution-a-day orbit for animals that needed light gravity. He had thirty-seven more beasts in that. All in all, he had one animal from every planet in Sector Sixty-four W that had life. He figured that he needed just one more animal to complete his collection. He wanted a sample of a creature from the Home Planet; one live and healthy sample of Earth's biggest animal. And he wanted to know if I could ship it to him.

"Well, I didn't give the matter too much thought. After all, I said to myself, if somebody had managed a three hundred ton monster almost two hundred feet long, I ought to be able to manage a little bitty elephant. So I said yes, and I gave him a contingent-on-satisfactory-delivery contract, for one adult specimen of Earth's largest animal, male or female, in good condition.

"It wasn't until about that time that the Prinkip told me how that biggest monster had been shipped. It had arrived in a cardboard box, wrapped in cotton. It seems that pfleeg eggs weigh just a little under three ounces. Well, I'd been done but I still figured I could make delivery."

HE lapsed into silence for a moment, thinking deeply. "Did you know that there are two kinds of elephants on Earth, the African and the Indian, and that they aren't exactly the same size?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Our schools don't go that far," I said.

He nodded. "Neither do ours. So I immediately bought an Indian elephant. They're the kind, back on the Home planet, that you can find tame and easy to handle. They're also the wrong kind. The only reason I didn't head right back with it is that I was having trouble figuring out how to carry it in the *Crucis*. Even an Indian elephant weighs about six tons. At least, mine did. In itself, that's not a very big load, but the trip back would take a good many months of subjective

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time, and of course elephants eat on subjective time. And how they eat! The food I carried would weigh the same as the elephant.

"I wondered how elephants would like weightlessness, so I took my Indian elephant up on a little jaunt around Earth's satellite. The Moon, they call it. Elephants don't like weightlessness at all." He paused, and signaled the bartender for another drink. "I hope you never have to clean up after a space-sick elephant," he said darkly.

"That meant that I'd have to put spin on the *Crucis* for the entire trip back to Penguin. It's hard enough to try to navigate in hyperspace with spin on your ship, but that wasn't the worst of it. An elephant is a tremendous amount of off-center load for a ship with a large fraction of a one-gee spin on it. Too much load even to think about handling. Even though I couldn't come up with an answer, right off hand, I went ahead and turned in my Indian elephant on an African model. Beulah was her name, and she was a husky girl. She weighed in at just a little more than eight tons."

I waved my whisky glass at Captain Hannah. "But I don't see your problem," I said. "If you put the elephant on one side and his food on the other, there wouldn't be any off-balanced load, would there?"

"Not until the food was eaten, anyway," said the skipper witheringly, and I subsided with a fresh drink.

"BEULAH was kind of cute, for all of her tonnage," said the skipper. "She had two enormous tusks, and a pair of ears like wings, and a nose that was longer than her tail. But she was mighty friendly, after she got to know me. She'd pick me up and carry me around, if I asked her to. And she'd eat right out of my hand. She turned out to be even tamer than the Indian elephant. All I had to do was figure out how to carry her.

"For a starter, I figured like you said, to have Beulah on one side of the cargo compartment, and her chow on the other. Then I calculated to have my own supplies on the other two sides of the space, so that I could move them away from her as her food stocks got smaller, and hold the balance that way. That wasn't enough, of course, so I built a couple of water tanks on the opposite side of the ring from Beulah.

"As you know, not much can be done about moving water around in a space ship – it's got its own cooling chores to perform – but every little bit helped. Finally, I jockeyed the master computer and the auxiliary computer down and ran them on tracks, so I could slide

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them around to compensate for Beulah's appetite. Some lead slugs brought the auxiliary's weight up equal to the master's, and they also brought my total load up to the absolute maximum that I could carry.

"It was almost enough. But a miss is as good as a mile, for a space ship. I was stuck, and there didn't seem to be a thing I could do about it. Even if I could have carried more weight it wouldn't have helped. Any more mass in the cargo compartment would have thrown the c.g. too far aft." He beckoned for more rhial.

"So what did you do?" I prompted. "You did say that you carried the elephant, didn't you?"

"Sure. Like I said, a Delta class freighter can do almost anything. Beulah gave me the answer herself. If you've ever lived with an elephant, one thing becomes clear mighty fast. They're a mighty efficient machine for converting fodder into elephant droppings. So I made a bin on the opposite side of the compartment from Beulah, and let her gradually fill it while she ate me out of balance. The weight of the — what's a nice word for it? — was just enough to let me keep the whole setup in dynamic balance."

"Compost heap?" I suggested dreamily, picturing the arrangement in my mind. There was poetry in it. Or was it poetic justice that I had in mind?

"THAT'S it," said Captain Hannah. "Compost heap. Well, I started the journey with the ship full and Beulah and the compost heap empty. I finished pretty much the other way around. I suppose it sounds easy, but it wasn't.

"I started off with Beulah chained down in the middle of the compartment, and everything stacked around her. She didn't want me to leave when I went up to the bridge to take off, and hollered as piteously as you can imagine. But I couldn't have a nurse for her — mahout, they call them. I couldn't spare the weight. Or the salary, for that matter. She was chained down, so she couldn't move around and upset the balance.

"After chemical take off, we slid into parking orbit as sweet as you please. I hurried down to shift the load around. I didn't want to stay weightless any longer than I had to, because I remembered that sick Indian elephant — and Beulah outweighed him by almost two tons, and had a larger stomach to match. Of course, the Indian elephant had gone into orbit on a full belly, and I hadn't let Beulah have a bite to eat for hours. It made a difference, let me tell you.

"Beulah made trouble in her own way, though. As soon as I got within reach, she grabbed me with that long nose of hers, and wouldn't let go. She didn't hurt me or anything like that; she just wanted

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company in her misery. I couldn't coax her with food. The very thought of food made her shudder.

"I couldn't reach her chains to cut her loose, and I couldn't reach the radio to call for help. If it hadn't been for the Ionosphere Guard, I might have starved to death. I'd hired the parking orbit for twelve hours, and when I was still in it after that time, Port Control started to holler. I could hear them on my loud speaker, but I couldn't answer them. So the Ionosphere Guard finally sent up a small craft with a lieutenant and a three-man crew in it to see what was wrong.

"THOSE sailors were good. They didn't even look surprised; they just went to work as if they handled elephants in space every day. They drove four lines through the ring bolts I'd welded in the spin-deck, cast Beulah loose and hauled her over to her new spot as neat as you please.

"Then, no nonsense, the lieutenant ordered Beulah to let loose of me. She did, too.

"After that they left, stopping for just one drink of my good bourbon. I didn't drink rhial then.

"I wirelessed Port Control my penalty fees and another twelve hour's hire in the orbit, and started shifting the load. I was working on an empty stomach, and Beulah still didn't feel hungry, so she didn't remind me that I hadn't eaten. I almost collapsed before I got the job done.

"Then I put spin on, which made Beulah comfortable at last, and tried to juggle the ship into a hyper-trajectory, still without stopping for food or sleep. It didn't take long before Beulah started squalling for supper. After I fed her I had to adjust balance all over again. By that time I was pushing my new twelve-hour limit, and I didn't give much of a damn any more. I just counted to ten and pushed the button. Then I turned in and slept until Beulah started squalling for breakfast. I ignored her until I ate about three squares in a row, then I fed her and adjusted balance. After that I checked my trajectory.

"It was the best I've ever made in twenty-four years of jumping. It was beautiful.

"So I turned back in again and slept until Beulah woke me for lunch. I didn't know it at the time, but Beulah was eating for two. That possibility probably should have occurred to me earlier, what with the name 'Beulah', but you can't think of everything, and there I was, the first man to go into hyperspace with an elephant. Anyway, it didn't even worry me, even when I found out about it. I checked the contract. Everything seemed to be well covered. And according to my book on elephants, Beulah should still be only a potential mother when we reached

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Penguin. As a matter of fact, the whole idea made me feel just a little bit proud. Like a father, you know?

"What with having to shift weights after every meal, and Beulah setting the schedule for meals, I was kept mighty busy. My self-winding wristwatch overwound itself and stopped, in spite of the advertisements about it, and I didn't find out for almost two weeks, subjective, that Beulah's stomach ran fast. What's more, I think she knew it. Because when I finally woke up to what was going on, and started to run her schedule by the clock, she didn't fuss a bit. Beulah's a clever girl.

"I was so worn out when we finally reached Penguin that I just slid into orbit, kept spin on, laid out a couple of extra meals for Beulah and slept the clock around. The Prinkip was mighty mad about it when I finally turned on my radio, but I told him I had my cargo ready for delivery and where did he want me to put it? So he calmed down and gave me the coordinates.

"OF course, I had to take off the spin and shift Beulah back to the landing deck, and there wasn't any Ionosphere Guard around to help me if I got into any kind of trouble. So I was mighty careful. I put the chains on Beulah again, and then set up trip ropes so I could cut her loose without getting inside of reach of that nose of hers. Then I ran lines back to the first set of ring bolts, so I could drag her back, weightless, without any trouble. Beulah looked a little unhappy, but didn't make any fuss about it all. I started to take spin off, giving the orders to the angle jets through the computer right down in the cargo compartment, so the old girl wouldn't worry about where I was.

"Beulah didn't squall as her weight came off this time. She just reached down and tripped loose the chains around her ankles. Did I tell you that she was mighty clever?"

I nodded.

"Well, she started around that spin deck after me. I punched into the computer the maximum order for spin reduction, and started around the spin deck to keep away from her. Beulah grabbed hold of the computer with her nose — for support, I guess — when she got over there. She yanked the whole thing clear off the deck, breaking its cable. *Crucis* lurched once.

"And I ended up in the compost heap.

"With Beulah way off center, and with that last wild burst from the jets before they cut off, the ship was gyrating in a way that made *my* stomach uneasy. It didn't seem to bother Beulah, though. She just wanted to be near me. I got out of there fast, and went up onto the bridge.

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'The main computer was out, of course. I couldn't interrogate the auxiliary computer remotely, so I had to fly that wobbling ship to a stop by the seat of my pants. I did it, too.

"Then I went back to the cargo compartment and hauled Beulah into the center. She didn't make any more trouble — she was sorry for what she had done.

"The coordinates the Prinkip had given me looked almighty close to a big pond that I didn't recall having seen before, but I was too busy making a landing with minimum fuel to ask him about it. I finally fought her down safely with one leg of my tripod actually in the pond, and clouds of steam rising up around *Delta Crucis*. I call it a pond. But on a normal-size planet it would be a good big lake.

"Anyway, I had made it safely to Penguin, and my elephant was alive and healthy. I congratulated Beulah when I untied her, and then I took her outside to meet the Prinkip. I think I was a little proud of myself, and of Beulah, and of *Delta Crucis*, too."

I WAS so stirred by hearing about this successful conclusion of Captain Hannah's mission that I shook his hand warmly and ordered a round of drinks for everyone in the room. Fortunately, it was not very crowded at the time.

"That's not quite the end of the story," said the skipper. "You see, the Prinkip had built the pond to keep Beulah in. He had somehow gotten the idea that I was bringing him a whale."

I looked blank.

"An Earth mammal. It lives in the oceans, and runs to maybe seventy or eighty tons."

I sat down slowly, and then made a sudden dive for my contract for the use of the *Delta Crucis*.

The skipper nodded. "I had a contingent contract with the Prinkip, too," he said, "and I hadn't delivered. I still haven't figured out how to make delivery of a whale, but I will some day.

"And if you're looking for that part of our contract where you agree to store any residual cargo I may be carrying, it's all legal and binding. Until I get back from hauling your Gasha root, you'll have to care for one adult female African elephant. But I'm sure you'll get to like Beulah as much as I have. She's a mighty clever elephant."

I called the waiter over and ordered a beaker of rhial.

"But you're lucky at that," said Hannah. "Check subparagraph f of paragraph 74 of our contract: Incidental accrual. When Beulah has her baby, the little tyke will be all yours."

Now I know why Captain Hannah drinks rhial in the morning.

So do I.

— L. J. STECHER, JR.

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DRUNKARD'S WALK

Conclusion

A war of total annihilation raged within one man. He decidedly was not his own worst enemy. Then who was?

SYNOPSIS

Cornut has only this one problem: he keeps trying to kill himself. There is no reason for it that he can find. Only unhappy people commit suicide and Cornut is a busy, productive mathematics instructor, specializing in the Mnemonics of Number, so successful that not only does he have a TV class of three million Townies but a live one of almost a hundred Gownies! The Townies, all 12 billion of them, live and eat and work bunched together, pressed for room, whereas Gownies are privileged to attend University — and Cornut is

VIII

THE assistant audio engineer, staring bemused through the glass at the filling studio, was humming to himself. It irritated Master Carl. He could not help fitting words to the tune:

Strike the twos and strike the threes:
The Sieve of Eratosthenes!
When the multiples sublime
The numbers that are left are prime.

It did not alleviate his annoyance that the song was one of his own. Classic prime-number exposition was not the subject of the morning's class; it was set theory.

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By **FREDERIK POHL** Illustrated by EMSH

specially privileged, for he was born at University, raised there in the most approved trauma-free manner, studied and now teaches there. And yet nine times in the past seven weeks he has nearly killed himself, the latest being an attempt to climb out of his window, 18 stories above the ground, and is saved just barely in time by

EGERD, *an undergraduate, whom Cornut has drafted into an elaborate system of alarms to protect himself against suicide. Since the danger is greatest when Cornut is waking, Egerd's job is to come into Cornut's room and make sure he is really awakened by the synchronized alarms. This time, however, Egerd is just tardy enough for Cornut to be half out of the window, but in time to pull him back, and for being in the corridor without shaving he is severely reprimanded by*

MASTER CARL, *house master, aged 70, head of the Mathematics Department, and Cornut's friend. To the extent that Master Carl can remain interested in anything but math and submicrophotography and other such preoccupations, he would like to help Cornut. But a Field Expedition has been ordered by*

ST. CYR, *the president of the University, a very old, very strange, very dictatorial man, to pick up several aborigines from an island in the Pacific, and even though that means leaving the system of safeguards and has nothing whatever to do with mathematics, Master Carl insists on Cornut's coming along on the Field Expedition rather than risk St. Cyr's displeasure. Before going, Cornut is told by Med Center that others have gone through the same baffling process of causeless suicides. Some succeeded quickly, others took longer, but the very longest on record is ten weeks — and Cornut has made nine attempts in seven weeks — so his maximum life expectancy is 20 days! Master Carl urges him to take a wife and suggests*

LOCILLE, *a pretty undergraduate, in love with Cornut, loved by Egerd, and Cornut does offer her a marriage of convenience — his convenience. For something surely has to be done to protect him, and, as Master Carl argues, what better protection than a wife who will be on hand at those falling asleep and waking moments? On the morning after his marriage, Cornut finds he has looked for a human alarm clock and received very much more. Locille, going to class, has asked him to take wake-up pills, not only to get to his own class on time but to avoid the deadly drowsy state. In horror, Cornut discovers that he has taken sleepy pills by mistake, and as he drifts helplessly toward murderous slumber, his bitterness is heightened by being caught now that he cares.*

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He snapped: "Be still, man! Don't you like your work here?"

The assistant audio engineer paled. He had been brought up on a texas and never stopped dreading the day that he might have to go back to one.

It was not really true that the humming distracted Master Carl. At his age, you either know what you are doing or you don't, and he knew. He went on at the precise moment his theme began and spoke the words he always spoke, while his mind was on Cornut, on the Wolgren anomaly, on his private investigation of the paranormal, on — *especially* on — the responses and behavior of each individual undergraduate in his studio audience. He noted every yawn of a drowsy nucleonics major in the far corner; he observed with particular care the furtive passage of notes from the boy, Egerd, to his protege's — Cornut's — new wife, Locille. He did not intend to do anything about it.

He was grateful to Locille. As a good watchdog, she might very well save the life of Cornut, the only man on the faculty Carl considered to have any chance of ever replacing himself.

In five minutes he had concluded the live portion of his lecture and, indulging his own harmless desires, left the studio. Taped figures danced on the screen behind him, singing *The Ballad of Sets.*

Let S be a number set, then
progress:
If, of any two numbers (a
and b) in S,
Their sum is also in the set,
The set is closed! *And so we*
get
A reproductive set *with this*
definition:
"The number set S is closed
by addition!"

HE put the class out of his mind and eagerly drew a sheaf of photographic prints out of his briefcase. He had slept only restlessly the night before and had risen early to work at his newest hobby. He had had many. He needed many. Carl was in no way dissatisfied, could not have conceived a world in which he would not have been a mathematician, but it wasn't all pleasure to be a towering elder statesman in a young man's game. It was a queer fact of mathematics that nearly every great mathematician had done his best work before he was thirty. And most of them, like Carl, had turned to other curiosities in their later years.

Someone opened the door, and the choral voices reached him:

If number set M is closed by
subtraction,

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A modul *is the term for this transaction!*

Master Carl turned, frowning like ice. Egerd! He demanded terribly: "What is a number set closed by multiplication?"

Egerd quailed but said: "It's a ray, Master Carl. It's in the fourth canto. Sir, I want to —"

"Closed to addition and subtraction as well?"

"A ring, sir. Can I speak to you a moment?"

Carl grunted.

"I did study the lesson, Master Carl, as you can see."

He would have said more, but Carl had not finished being stern. "There is no excuse, Egerd, for leaving a class without permission. You know that. It may seem to you that you are able to grasp set theory by studying from books, no doubt. You are wrong. A mathematician must know these simple classical facts and definitions as well as he knows that February has twenty-eight days, and in the same way. By mnemonics! I assure you that you will never become a first-rate mathematician by cutting your classes."

"Yes, sir. That's it. I want to transfer out. As soon as I get back from South America, if it's all right with you, sir."

Master Carl was horrified.

This was not a case for discipline, he saw at once. Carl did not consider that the separation of Egerd from mathematics would be a loss to mathematics. It was compassion for the boy himself that gave him concern.

He temporized by handing Egerd one of his photographs. "See anything?"

EGERD was very patient and took the time to examine the print thoroughly before shaking his head.

"Look at it from this angle, Egerd . . . No?" Master Carl sighed and put the photograph back on the desk. No, it didn't really look like a star at all. It looked like light-struck film, botched in developing.

"Becquerel's didn't look any better," he said. "Well. What is it you want to transfer to?"

"Med School, sir. I've made up my mind." He added, "You can understand why, Master Carl. I don't have much talent for this stuff."

Carl didn't understand; he would never understand. He had, however, some long time before that made up his mind that there were things about his students that didn't much need understanding. His students had many facets; only one concerned him. They were like those paper patterns the soft-headed undergraduates in Topology played with,

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hexihexiflexagons, constructions that turned up new sides in bewildering variety each time they were flexed.

He said mournfully: "All right. I'll sign your release." He scowled when he saw that Egerd already had it filled out and ready for him; the boy was *too* eager.

The door opened again.

Master Carl halted with the pen in his hand. "Now what?" He recognized the man — vaguely — that hanger-on of the Department of Liberal Arts whose name escaped him.

The man said with agitation: "Excuse me. I'm sorry. Name's Farley. I'm Master Cornut's sex writer —"

"I have no objection to that. I *do* object to having my privacy disturbed." Although that was not quite true, either. Master Carl was prude enough (perhaps because he was woman-shy enough) to feel that the private affairs of men and women should not be inspired by scripts provided by sexwriters or, as they were once called, marriage counselors. *He* would never have employed one, and he was irked with Cornut.

As it turned out, neither had Cornut. "I was a wedding present," Farley explained, "and so I went to see Cornut this morning with a rough thirty-day draft. I don't use standard forms; I believe in personalized counseling. So I thought I'd better interview the male subject right away because, as I'm sure you know —"

Egerd interrupted desperately: "Master Carl. Please sign my transfer."

The expression in his eyes said more than his words. The flexagon turned up another side, and this time Carl was able to read its design. He nodded and wrote his name. It was entirely clear that Egerd's reasons for transferring away from Locille and Master Cornut had nothing to do with his talent for mathematics.

But the sexwriter would not be stopped. "Then where is the female subject, Master Carl?" he demanded. "They said she would be here."

"Locille? Of course." A terrible thought entered Carl's mind. "You mean that something happened *again?* When you went to see Cornut, he was —"

"Out cold, yes. Almost dead. He's having his stomach pumped now, though. They think he'll be all right."

WHEN they reached Cornut's room, the medic was scanning a spectrum elaborated for him by a portable diagnosticon. Cornut himself was unconscious. The medic reassured them: "Close, but he missed again. How

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far is he from that ten-week record?"

Carl interrupted frostily: "Can you wake him up? Good. Then do."

The medic shrugged and fished for a hypodermic. He slipped the piston of the needle into the barrel; the faint spray appeared over Cornut's unbroken skin. The tiny droplets found their way through dermis and epidermis and subcutaneous fat and, in a moment, Cornut sat up.

He said clearly: "I had the most ridiculous dream."

And then he saw Locille and his face went alight. That, at least, was no dream. Master Carl had little tact, but he had enough to take the medic and leave the two of them there.

The experience of having one's stomach pumped is not attractive. This was Cornut's third time, but he had not come to like it; he tasted bile and foulness, his esophagus had been painfully scraped, and the sleepy pills had left him with a headache.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Locille brought him a glass and one of the capsules the medic had left. He swallowed it and began to chuckle. "Lucky Wahl," he said. "You know, if I'd been awake when that fellow came in, I'd have gone over and punched Wahl in the head. It was his idea — he got half of Anthropology to chip in to buy us Farley's services for a year. As it is — I guess Wahl saved my life."

He got up and began to wander around. In spite of the taste and the head, he was feeling rather cheerful, in an unanalyzed way. Even the dream, though queer, had not been unpleasant. Master Carl and Egerd had been in it, and so had St. Cyr and the woman from South America; but so had Locille.

He paused by his desk. "What's this?"

It was a neat sheaf of papers clipped in a folder on which was printed: *S. R. Farley, Consultant.* That was all. Just *Consultant.* He opened it and found the first page a cleanly typed set of what seemed to be equations. The symbols ♂ and ♀ occurred frequently, along with strokes, daggers and congruencies which he more or less remembered from an undergraduate course in symbolic logic.

"That's almost a Boölean notation," he said interestedly. "I wonder . . . Say, look at this, Locille. Line three. If you substitute these three terms from the expansion in line four, and then —"

He stopped. She was blushing.

But he hadn't noticed; he was suddenly scowling at his desk.

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"My Wolgren! Where is it?"

"If you mean the report on distributive anomalies you were preparing for Master Carl, he took it as he went out."

"But it isn't finished!"

"He didn't want you working on it. Or anything. He wants you to take the day off — get away from the campus—and he wants me to stay with you."

HE stared glumly at the window. "Hum." He made tasting motions with his lips and tongue and made a face. "Where is there to go, off campus? Do you have any ideas?"

Locille looked a little worried. "As a matter of fact," she said diffidently, "I do."

At sundown they boarded the one-a-day ferry to the texas; there was traffic enough from the city to the texas, and even from the University to the city, but between the texas and the University there was almost none. They leaned against the rail as the ferry rose, looking down at the University's island, the city and the bay. The almost silent blades overhead chopped the scarlet sunset sky into dots and dashes. All they could hear inside the domed deck of the ferry was a bass flutter of blades and a more-than-soprano hiss of the blade-tip jets.

Locille said abruptly: "I didn't tell you about Roger. My brother," she added in a rush.

Cornut stopped an emotion before it had quite got started. "What about him?" he asked, relieved.

"He isn't University caliber. He might have been, but — when Roger was about five years old, he was swimming off the texas — there was another boy in the water, and he dove. They collided. The — the other boy drowned." She paused, turning to look at him. "Roger fractured his skull. Ever since then, he's been — his intelligence never developed much past that point."

Cornut received the information, frowning.

It was not that he minded a stupid brother-in-law; it was only that he had never thought of there being any brother-in-law at all. It had never occurred to Cornut that marriage involved more than two people.

"He isn't insane," Locille said worriedly, "just not intelligent."

Cornut hardly heard her. He was busy trying to cope with the thought that there was more here than watchdog or love; there was something here that he had never counted on. It took twenty minutes to fly the rest of the way to the texas, and it took all of that time for Cornut to puzzle out the fact that he had taken on more than a conveni-

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ence or a pleasure — he had assumed a sort of obligation as well.

THE texas stood in ninety feet of water, just over the horizon from Sandy Hook. It was fifteen acres of steel decks, twelve levels high, the lowest of the levels forty feet above mean high water. It was not the fault of the designers of the texas that "mean high water" was an abstraction, the average distance between trough and peak of the great swells of the ocean. The texas crouched on hundreds of metal legs that sank through the ooze to the bedrock beneath, and it was a target. In storms the whitecaps slapped punishingly at its underbelly. If there was lightning, it was sure to strike at the radar beacon on the tower.

Time was when those radars had been the reason for the existence of texas towers. That time was past; satellite eyes and ionosphere-scatter search methods had ended their importance. But the world had found other uses for them. They guided the whale-backed submersibles of the world's cargo fleets surfacing over the continental shelf to find harbor. They served as mother "ships" for the ranging fishery fleets in shallow seas. They provided living room for tens of millions on the American seaboard alone. They provided work space for nuisance industries — the ones that smelled, or were loud, or were dangerous.

Power was free, nearly, on a texas. Each hollow leg was slotted in its lower stretch. The waves that came crashing by compressed the air in the columns, valved through a one-way exhaust into a pressure tank; pneumatic turbines whirred at the release vents of the tanks, and the texas' lights and industries drew current from those turbines. In "good" weather — when the waves roared and pounded — there was power enough to smelt aluminum; the ore boats that unloaded the raw materials carried away the slag, dumping it within sight of the texas itself in the unfillable disposal pit of the ocean. When weather was "bad" — when the Atlantic was glassy smooth — aluminum making stopped for a while. But weather was never really "bad" for long.

Locille's parents lived with her brother in a three-room apartment in the residential area of the texas. It was leeward of the fisheries, across the texas from the aluminum refinery, six levels above the generators. Cornut thought it horrible. It smelled and it was noisy.

Locille had brought presents. A sash for her father, some-

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thing cosmetic for her mother and, Cornut saw with astonishment, one of the flags of the aborigines as a gift for her brother Roger. It had not occurred to Cornut that there should be gifts, much less gifts as expensive as any aboriginal artifact; the things were in great demand as conversation pieces. But he was grateful. The flag was a conversation piece here, too, and he needed one. Locille's mother brought out coffee and cakes, and Cornut entertained them with the Field Expedition to the Pacific island.

He did not, however, mention the blowing up of the plane he was to have been on, his blackout by the side of the road in the tropical jungle — and he could not keep his eyes off Roger.

LOCILLE'S brother was a huge young man, taller than Cornut, with a pleasant expression and dull eyes. He was not offered coffee and refused cake; he sat there, watching Cornut, fingering the worn fabric of his gift, even smelling it, rubbing it against his face. Cornut found him disconcerting. Bar the aboriginals and a handful of clinical cases under study, there was not one human being on the campus with an IQ under a hundred and ten, and Cornut had no experience of the simple-minded. The boy could talk — but mostly did not — and though he seemed to understand what Cornut was saying, he never changed expression.

The fact of the matter was that Roger didn't much care what Cornut was saying. His whole attention was taken up with his gift. As soon as he thought it was proper to do so, he excused himself and carried it to his room.

Roger was aware that it was very old and came from very far away, but that could have been something of last week's, from the city just below the horizon; he had little memory. What Roger thought principally about the flag was that it was a pretty color.

He fixed it with magnetic tacks to the wall of his room, stood back thoughtfully, removed the tacks and replaced the flag closer to his bed. He stood there looking at it, because somehow it satisfied him to stand and look at it.

It was bright moonlight outside, but there was a fair wind sweeping across the long reach from Portugal. The waves were high; and the pneumatic hammer-hammer, and the rattleslam of the valves opening and closing pounded through the texas, one noise reinforcing the other. It made it hard for anyone to talk in the other room. (Cornut was

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growing more and more hoarse and deafened and uneasy.) But it didn't bother Roger. Since the day his own crushed skull had minced a corner of his brain, nothing had really *bothered* Roger.

He liked the flag. After ten minutes of staring at it, he took off the magnets that held it, folded it and put it under his pillow. Smiling with pleasure, he went back into the other room to say goodnight to his sister's new husband.

IX

MASTER Carl lighted a do-not-disturb sign on his door and opened the folding screen that hid his little darkroom from the casual eyes of the student housekeepers. He was not ashamed of the hobby that made him operate a darkroom; it was simply none of their business. Carl was not ashamed of anything he did. His room attested to that; it bore the marks of all his interests.

Three boards held chess problems half worked out and forgotten, the pieces lifted, dusted and replaced by a dozen generations of student maids. On the walls were framed prints of Minoan scenes and inscriptions, the ten-year-old relics of his statistical examination into the grammar of Linear B. A carton that had once contained a dozen packs of Rhine cards (and still contained five unopened packs) showed the two years he had spent in demonstrating to his own satisfaction, once for all, that telepathy was not possible.

The proof rested on an analogy, but Master Carl had satisfied himself that the analogy was valid. If, he supposed, telepathic communications could be subsumed under the general equations of Unified Field Law, it had to fall into one of the two possible categories therein. It could be tunable, like the electromagnetic spectrum; or it could be purely quantitative, like the kineto-gravitic realms. He eliminated the second possibility at once: it implied that every thought would be received by every person within range, and observation denied that on the face of it.

Telepathy, if it existed at all, therefore had to be tunable. Carl then applied his analogy. Crystals identical in structure resonate at the same frequency. Humans identical in structure do exist; they are called identical twins. For two years Master Carl had spent most of his free time locating, persuading and testing pairs of identical twins.

It took two years, and no more,

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because that was how long it took him to find three hundred and twenty-six pairs; and three hundred and twenty-six was the number the chi-square law gave as the minimum universe in which a statistical sampling could be regarded as conclusive. As soon as the three hundred and twenty-sixth twin had failed to secure significantly more than chance correlation with the card symbols viewed by his sibling, Carl had closed out the experiment at once.

When the two-year job was ended, Carl was not angry; he had simply disproved something. It did not occur to him to go on to a three hundred and twenty-seventh set. He did, however, permit himself to turn to investigating other aspects of what had once been called psionics.

PRECOGNITION he eliminated on logical grounds. Clairvoyance he pondered over for several months before deciding that, like the conjecture that flying saucers were of extraterrestrial origin, it offered too few opportunities for experimental verification to be an attractive study. Hexing he ruled out as necessarily involving either telepathy or clairvoyance. It was not the cases in which the sufferer knew he was hexed that offered a problem; simple suggestion could account for most of those — a man who saw the wax doll with the pins in it, or was told by the ju-ju man that his toenails were being roasted, might very easily sicken and die out of fear. But if the victim did not learn of his hex through physical means, he could learn only by either telepathy or clairvoyance; and Carl had eliminated them.

The traditional list of paranormal powers included only two other phenomena: Fire-sending and telekinesis.

Carl elected to consider the first only a subdivision of the second. Speeding the Brownian movement of molecules (i.e., heating them) to the point of flame was surely no different in kind than gross manipulation of groups of molecules (i.e., moving material objects).

His first attempts at telekinesis involved a weary time of attempting to shift bits of matter, papers first, then balanced pins, hanging threads, finally grains of dust on a microbalance. There was no result. Co-opting some help from Classical Physics, Carl then began a series of tests involving photographic film. It was, the drafted physicists assured him, the medium in which the least physical force produced the greatest measurable effect. A photon, a free electron, almost any particle containing energy

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could shift the unstable molecules in the film emulsion.

Carl worked with higher speed emulsions, and higher and higher, learning tricks to make the film still more sensitive — special developers, close temperature control, pre-exposing the film to "soak up" part of the energy necessary to produce an image.

With each new batch of film, he sat for hours, attempting to paint circles, crosses and stars on the emulsion with his mind, visualizing the molecules and willing the change-over. He scissored out stencils and held them over the wrapped film packs, considering it possible that the mental "radiation" might show only as a point source.

He had one temporary and illusive success: A plate of particularly trigger-happy film, wrapped under his pillow all one night, developed the next morning into a ghostly, wavering "X." Master Florian of Photochemistry disillusioned him. Carl had only succeeded in so sensitizing the film that it reacted to the tiny infrared produced by his own body heat.

MASTER Carl's project for this night involved pre-exposing a specially manufactured batch of X-ray film by means of contact with a sheet of luminescent paper. The faint gamma radiation from the paper needed hours to affect the emulsion, but those hours had to be accurately timed.

To fill the space of those hours, Master Carl had another pleasant task. He sent a student courier to his office for the unfinished draft he had abstracted from Cornut's room. It was headed:

A Reconciliation
Of Certain Apparent Anomalies
In Wolgren's Distributive Law

Carl drew a stiff-backed chair up to his desk and began to read, enjoying himself very much.

Wolgren's Law, which had to do with the distribution of non-uniform elements in random populations, was purely a mathematician's rule. It did not deal with material objects; it did not even deal with numerical quantities as such. Yet Wolgren's Law had found applications in every sort of sampling technique known to man, from setting parameters for rejecting inferior batches of canned sardines to predicting election results. It was a general law, but the specific rules that could be drawn from it had proved themselves in nearly every practical test.

In every test but one.

One of Carl's graduate students attempted to reconcile the

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Wolgren rule with census data for his doctoral thesis — queerly, the subject seemed never to have been covered. The boy failed. He found another subject, got his degree and was now happily designing communications systems for the TV syndicates, but in failing he had produced a problem worth the attention of a first-rate mathematician; and Carl had offered it to Cornut.

Cornut had worked on it, in his own after-hours time, for six months. Incomplete as it was, the report gave Master Carl three hours of intensive enjoyment. Trust Cornut to do a beautiful job!

Carl followed every step, mumbling to himself, cocking an eyebrow at the use of chi-squared until it was proved by a daring extension of Gibbs' phase-analysis rule. The mathematical statement concerned him, not the subject of census figures themselves.

It was only when he had finished the report and sat back, glowing, that he wondered why Cornut had thought it was not finished. But it was! Every equation checked! The constants were standard and correct, the variables were pinned down and identified with page after page of expansions.

"Very queer," said Carl to himself, staring vacantly at the bench where his X-ray film was quietly soaking up electrons. "I wonder if —"

He shrugged and attempted to dismiss the problem. It would not be dismissed. He thought for a moment of calling in Cornut, but stopped himself. The boy would not be back from his visit to Locille's family, and even if he were, it was no longer in good taste to burst in on him.

Dissatisfied, Master Carl read again the last page of the report. The math was correct. This time he allowed the sense of it to penetrate: "Of n births, the attained age of the oldest member of the population shall equal n times a constant e-log q." Well? Why not?

Carl was irritated. He glanced at his clock. It was only ten.

Frowning, he buttoned his jacket and went out, leaving lights on, door open, report open on the desk . . . and the X-ray film still firmly taped to its gamma-emitting paper.

NO one answered his knock on Cornut's door, so Master Carl, after a moment's thought, pushed it open. The room was empty; the couple had not returned from the texas.

Carl grumbled at the night-proctor and took the elevator down to the campus. He thought a stroll might help. It was chilly, but he scarcely noticed. The q

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quantity — was there something wrong with that? But its expansions were all in order. He recalled, as clearly as though they were imprinted on the wall of the Administration Building ahead of him, the equations defining *q;* he even remembered what quantities those equations involved. Public health, warfare, food supply, a trickily derived value for the state of the public mind . . . they had all been in the accompanying tabulations.

"Good night, Carl-san."

He stopped, blinking through the woven iron fence. He had reached the small encampment where the aboriginals were housed; the captain, whatever his name was, had greeted him.

"I thought you people were off — ah — lecturing," Carl said lamely. "On exhibition," he had been about to say.

"Tomorrow, Carl-san," said the waffle-faced man, offering Carl a long, feathered pipe. That had been in the briefing; it was a peace pipe, a quaint and for some reason, to the anthropologists a surprising, custom of the islanders. Carl shook his head. The man — Carl remembered his name; it was Masatura-san — said apologetically, "You softspeak hard, sir. I smell you coming long way yesterday."

"Really?" said Carl, not hearing a word. He was thinking about e-log and the validity of applying it; but that had been all right, too.

"Softspeak brownie not smell good," the man explained seriously.

"No, of course not." Carl was wondering about the values for *a,* the age factor in the final equation.

Tai-i Masatura-san said, growing agitated: "Cornut-san smell bad also, St. Cyr-san speak. Carl-san! Not speak brownie!"

Master Carl glanced at him. "Certainly," he said. "Good night."

The tai-i called after him beseechingly, but Carl still did not hear; he had realized what it was that was unfinished about Cornut's report. The numerical values had been given for every quantity but one.

It was still early; he did not intend to sleep until he had that one remaining value . . .

CORNUT, with his arm around Locille, yawned into the face of the red moon that hung over the horizon. It was growing very late.

They had had to take the ferry to the city and wait to transfer; the only direct popper from the texas to the city was in midmorning, and Locille's family had no place to put them up. Nor, if they had, would Cornut have

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stayed. He needed time to become accustomed to domesticity — it was too many things at once; bad enough that he should have to interrupt his routine to accommodate Locille's presence in his room.

But it was, on the whole, worth while.

The University was under them now, the cables of the bridge lacing the red moon, the lights from the Administration Building bright in the dark mass of towers.

It was odd that the Administration Building should still be lighted.

Drowsily Cornut looked, out of the corner of his eye, at the neat, sleepy head of his wife. He did not know if he liked her better or worse as a member of a family. Her parents — dull — amiable, he supposed, but he was used to brilliance. And her brother was an unfortunate accident, of course, but he had been so enchanted with the rag Locille had brought him, like a child, like an animal. Cornut was not quite pleased to be related to him. Naturally you couldn't choose your relatives. His own children, for example, might be quite disappointing . . .

His own children!

The thought had come quite naturally; but he had never had that particular thought before. Involuntarily he shivered, and looked again at Locille.

She said sleepily, "What's the matter?" And then: "Oh. Why, I wonder what they want."

The ferry was coming in close, and on the hardstand several men were waiting patiently, behind them a police popper, its blades still but its official-business light winking red. In the floodlights that revealed the landing X to the pilot, Cornut recognized one of the men, an administration staffer; the others all wore uniforms.

"I wonder," he said, glad that he didn't have to explain the shudder. "Well, I'll certainly sleep tonight." He took her hand and helped her, unnecessarily but pleasurably, down the steps.

A squat uniformed man stepped forward. "Master Cornut? Sergeant Rhame. You undoubtedly don't remember me, but —"

Cornut said, "But I do. You were in one of my classes six or seven years ago. Master Carl recommended you; in fact, he was your advocate at the orals for your thesis."

There was a pause. "Yes, that's right," said Rhame. "He wanted me to apply for the faculty, but I'd majored in forensic probabilistics and the Force had already accepted me, and — well, that's a long time ago."

Cornut nodded pleasantly.

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"Nice to see you again, Rhame. Good night."

RHAME shook his head. Cornut stopped, a quick, vague fear beginning to pulse in his mind. No one enjoys the sudden knowledge that the policeman in front of him wants to discuss official business; Rhame's expression told Cornut that that was so.

Cornut said sharply: "What is it?"

Rhame was not enjoying himself. "I've been waiting for you. It's about Master Carl; you're his closest friend, you know. There are some questions —"

Cornut hardly noticed Locille's sudden, frightened clutching at his arm. He stated: "Something's happened to Carl."

Rhame spread his hands. "I'm sorry. I thought you knew. The lieutenant sent word to have you called from the texas; you must have left before the message got there." He was trying to be kind, Cornut saw. "It happened about an hour ago, around twelve o'clock. The president had gone to bed — St. Cyr, I mean. Master Carl came storming into his residence — very angry, the housekeeper said."

"Angry about what?" asked Cornut in alarm.

"I was hoping you could tell us that. It must have been something pretty serious. He tried to kill St. Cyr with an axe. Fortunately —" He hesitated, but could find no way to withdraw the word. "As it happened, that is, the president's bodyguard was nearby. He couldn't stop Master Carl any other way. He shot Master Carl to death."

X

CORNUT went through that night and the next day in confusion. It was all very simple, everything was made easy for him, but it was impossibly hard to take. Carl dead! The old man shot down — attempting to commit a murder! It was more than unbelievable, it was simply fantastic. Cornut could not admit its possibility for a second.

But he could not deny that it had happened.

Locille was with him almost every moment, closer than a wife, even closer than a watchdog. He didn't notice she was there. But he would have noticed if she were missing. It was as though she had always been there, all his life, because his life was now something radically new, different, something that had begun at one o'clock in the morning, stepping out of a ferry popper to see Sergeant Rhame.

Rhame had asked him all the necessary questions in a quarter

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of an hour, but he had not left him then. It was charity, not duty, that kept him. A policeman, even a forensic probabilistician detailed to Homicide at his own personal request, is used to violence and unlikely murderers, and can sometimes help explain difficult facts to the innocent bystanders. He tried. Cornut was not grateful. He was only dazed.

He canceled his classes for the next day — tapes would do — and accompanied Rhame on a laborious retracing of Carl's last moves. First they visited St. Cyr's residence and found the president awake and icy. He did not seem shaken by his experience; but then he never did.

He gave them only a moment of his time. "Carl — a kill-er. It is a great shock, Cor-nut. Ge-ni-us, we can-not ex-pect it to be sta-ble, I sup-pose."

Cornut did not want to linger. St. Cyr's presence was never attractive, but the thing that repelled him about the interview was the sight of the 15th century halberd replaced on the floor where, they said, Master Carl had dropped it as the gunman shot him down. The pile of the carpet there was crisper, cleaner than the rest. Cornut was sickly aware that it had been washed, and aware what stain had been so quickly dissolved away.

He was glad to be out of the president's richly furnished residence, though the rest of the day was also no joy. Their next stop was the night-proctor on Carl's floor, who confirmed that the house master had left at about ten o'clock, seeming disturbed about something but, in his natural custom, giving no clue as to its nature to an undergraduate. Because it did not occur to them to question the aboriginals, they did not learn of his brief and entirely one-sided conversation, but they picked up his trail at the next point.

MASTER Carl had turned up at the Stacks at twenty-five minutes past ten, demanding instant service from the night librarian.

The librarian was a student, working off part of his tuition, as most students did. He was embarrassed and Cornut quickly deduced why. "You were asleep, weren't you?"

The student nodded, hanging his head. The news of Master Carl's death had reached every night clerk on the campus, and the boy had been unable to get to sleep. "He gave me five demerits and —" He stopped, suddenly angry with himself.

"Consider them canceled," Cornut said kindly. "You're quite right in telling us about the demerits, however. Sergeant

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Rhame needs all the information."

"Thank you, Master Cornut. I — uh — I also didn't have a chance to get the ashtray off my desk, and he noticed it. But he just said he wanted to use the Stacks." The undergraduate waved toward the great air-conditioned hall where the taped and microfilmed University Library was kept. The library computer was served by some of the same circuits as the Student Test-Indices (College Examinations) Digital Computer on the level above it; all the larger computers on the campus were cross-hooked to some degree.

Rhame was staring at the layout. "It's got more complicated since I was here," he said. "Did Master Carl know how to use it?"

The student grinned. "He thought he did. Then he came storming back to me. He couldn't get the data he wanted. So I tried to help him — but it was classified data. Census figures."

"Ah," said Cornut.

Sergeant Rhame turned and looked at him. "Ah what?"

Cornut said, "I think I know what he was after, that's all. It was the Wolgren."

Rhame understood what he was talking about — fortunately, for it had not occurred to Cornut that anyone would fail to be aware of Wolgren's Distributive Law. Rhame said, "I only use some special Wolgren functions. I don't see exactly what it has to do with census figures."

Cornut sat down, beginning to lecture. Without looking, he put out his hand and Locille, still with him, took it. "It's not important to what you're looking for. Anyway, I don't *think* it is. We had a question up for study — some anomalies in the Wolgren distribution of the census figures — and, naturally, there shouldn't be any anomalies. So I took it as a part-time project."

HE frowned. "I thought I had it beaten, but I ran into trouble. Some of the values derived from my equations turned out to be ridiculous. I tried to get the real values, but I got the same answer as Master Carl — they were classified. Silly, of course."

The student librarian chimed in, "*He* said moronic. He said he was going to take it up with the Saint —" He stopped, blushing.

Rhame said, "Well, I guess he did. What were the values that bothered you?"

Cornut shook his head. "Not important; they're wrong. Only I couldn't find my mistake. So I kept going over the math. I suppose Carl went through the same thing, and then decided to

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take a look at the real values in the hope that they'd give some clue, just as I did."

"Let's take a look," said Rhame. The student librarian led them to the library computer, but Cornut nodded him aside. He set up the integrals without any assistance.

"Age values," he explained. "Nothing of any great importance. No reason it should be a secret. But —"

He finished with the keyboard and indicated the viewer of the screen. It flickered and then bloomed with a blunt legend:

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

Rhame stared at the words. He said, "I don't know."

"I can't believe it, either. True, Carl was a house master. He felt he had certain rights . . ."

The policeman nodded. "What about it, son? Did he act peculiar?"

"He was mad as hell," said the student librarian. "He said he was going right over to the S — to the president's residence and get clearance to receive the data. Said it was moronic — let's see —, 'moronic, incompetent bureaucracy,' " he finished with satisfaction.

Sergeant Rhame looked at Cornut. "Well, the inquest will have to decide," he said after a moment.

"Do you think he would try to *kill* a man because of anything like this?" Cornut demanded harshly.

"Master Cornut," said the policeman slowly, "I don't think anybody ever really wants to kill anybody. But he blew his top. If he was angry enough, who knows?" He didn't give Cornut a chance to debate the matter. "I guess that's all," he said, turning back to the night librarian. "Unless he said anything else?"

The student hesitated, then grinned faintly. "Just one other thing. As he was leaving, he gave me ten more demerits for smoking on duty."

THE following morning Cornut was summoned to the chancellor's office to hear the reading of Carl's will.

Cornut was only mildly surprised to find that he was Master Carl's sole heir. He was touched, however. And he was saddened, for Master Carl's own voice told him about it.

That was the approved way of recording the most important documents, and it was like Master Carl to believe that the disposition of his tiny estate was of great importance. It was a tape of his image that recited the sonorous phrases: "Being of

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sound and disposing mind, I devise and bequeath unto my dear friend, Master Cornut —"

Cornut sat blinking at the image. It was entirely lifelike. That, of course, was the point; papers could be forged and sound tapes could be altered, but there was no artisan in the world who could quite succeed in making a change in a video tape without leaving a trace. The voice was the voice that had boomed out of millions of student television sets for decades.

Watching, Cornut hardly listened to the words but found himself trying to tell when it was that Carl had made the decision to leave him all his worldly goods. The cloak, he recalled vaguely, was an old one; but when was it Carl had stopped wearing it?

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered about Master Carl, not any more; the tape rattled and flapped off the reel, and the picture of Master Carl vanished from the screen.

Locille's hand touched his shoulder.

The chancellor said cheerfully, "Well, that's it. All yours. Here's the inventory."

Cornut glanced over it rapidly. Books, more than a thousand of them, value fixed by the appraisers (they must have been working day and night!) at five hundred dollars and a bit. Clothing and personal effects — Cornut involuntarily grinned — an arbitrary value of $1. Cash on hand, a shade over a thousand dollars, including the money in his pocket when he died. Equity in the University pension plan, $8,460; monthly salary due, calculated to the hour of death, $271; residuals accruing from future use of taped lectures, estimated, $500. Cornut winced. Carl would have been hurt by that, but it was true; there was less and less need for his old tapes, with newer professors using newer techniques. And there was an estimate of future royalties to be earned by his mnemonic songs, and that was unkindest of all: $50.

CORNUT did not bother to read the itemized liabilities — inheritance tax, income tax, miscellaneous bills. He only noted the net balance was a shade over $8,000.

The funeral director walked silently from the back of the room and suggested, rather handsomely, "Call it eight thousand even. Satisfactory? Then sign here, Master Cornut."

"Here" was at the bottom of a standard mortuary agreement, with the usual fifty-fifty split between the heirs and the mortician. Cornut signed quickly, with

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a feeling of slight relief. He was getting off very lightly. With cemetery space at such a premium, the statutory minimum fee for a basic funeral was $2500. If the estate had been less than $5,000, he would have inherited only the balance above $2500. If it had been under $2500, he would have had to make up the difference. That was the law. More than one beneficiary, legally responsible for funeral expenses, had regretted the generous remembering of the deceased. (In fact, there were paupers in the world who sold their wills as an instrument of revenge on occasion. For food, drink, clothing, or whatever, they would bequeath their paltry all to the benefactor's worst enemy, who would then, sooner or later, find himself saddled with an inescapable $2500 cost.)

Sergeant Rhame was waiting for them outside the chancellor's office. "Do you mind?" he asked politely, holding out his hand. Cornut handed over the mortuary agreement, containing the inventory of Carl's estate. The policeman studied it thoughtfully, then shook his head. "Not much money, but he didn't need much, did he? It doesn't help explain anything." He glanced at his watch. "I'll walk over with you. Were due right now at the inquest."

AS a tribute to the University the state medical examiner had impaneled a dozen faculty members as his jury. Only one was from the Mathematics Department, a woman professor named Janet, but Cornut dimly recognized several of the others from faculty teas and walks on the campus.

St. Cyr testified, briefly and in his customary uninflected pendulum-tick voice, that Master Carl had shown no previous signs of insanity but had been wild and threatening indeed the night of his death.

St. Cyr's housekeeper testified the same, adding that she had feared for her own life.

The bodyguard who killed Carl took the stand. Cornut felt Locille shrink in the seat beside him; he understood; he felt the same revulsion. The man did not seem much different from other men, though. He was middle-aged, husky, with a slight speech impediment.

He stated that he had been in President St. Cyr's employ for nearly ten years; that he had once been a policeman and that it was not uncommon for very wealthy men to hire ex-policemen as bodyguards; and that he had never before had to kill anyone in defense of St. Cyr's life. "But this one. He was dangerous. He was . . . going to kill . . .

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somebody." He got the words out slowly, but without appearing particularly concerned.

Then there were a few others — Cornut himself, the night-proctor, the student librarian, even the sexwriter, Farley, who said that Master Carl had indeed seemed agitated on his one personal contact with him but, of course, the occasion had been a disturbing one — Farley had told him of Master Cornut's most recent suicide attempt. Cornut attempted to ignore the faces that turned toward him.

The verdict took five minutes: "Killed in self-defense, in the course of attempting to commit murder."

For days after that, Cornut kept away from St. Cyr's residence, for the sake of avoiding Carl's executioner. He had never seen the man before Carl was killed and never wanted to see him again.

But as time passed, Carl's death dwindled in his mind; his own troubles, more and more, filled it. He began to approach, then reached, finally passed the all-time record for suiciders.

HE was still alive because of the endless patience and watchfulness of Locille. Every night she watched him go to sleep; every morning she was up before him.

She began to look pale, and he found her taking catnaps in the dressing room while he was lecturing to his classes, but she did not complain.

She also did not tell him, until he found the marks and guessed, that twice in one week, even with her alert beside him, he had nearly severed his wrists, first on a letter opener, second on a broken drinking tumbler. When he chided her for not telling him, she kissed him. That was all.

He was having dreams, too, queer ones; he remembered them sharply when he woke, and for a while told them to Locille, and then stopped. They were very peculiar. They had to do with being watched—being watched by some gruff, irritated warden, or by a hostile Roman crowd waiting for his blood in the arena.

They were unpleasant and he tried to analyze them by himself. It was because he was subconsciously aware of Locille watching him, he told himself; and in the next breath said, *Paranoia.* He did not believe it . . . but what then?

He considered returning to his analyst, but when he broached it to Locille, she only looked paler and more strained. Some of the sudden joy had gone out of their love, and that worried Cornut, and it did not occur to him that

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the building of trust and solidarity between them was perhaps worth more.

But not all the joy had gone. Apart from interludes of passion, somewhat constrained by Locille's ironclad determination to stay awake until he was fully asleep, apart from the trust and closeness, there were other things. There was the interest of work shared, for as Cornut's wife Locille became more his pupil than ever before in one of his classes; together they rechecked the Wolgren, found it correct, shelved it for lack of confirming data and began a new study of prime distribution in very large numbers. They were walking back to the Math Tower one warm day, planning a new approach through analytic use of the laws of congruence, when Locille stopped and caught his arm.

Egerd was coming toward them.

He was tanned, but he did not look well. Part of it was for reasons Cornut had only slowly come to know; he was uncomfortable in the presence of the girl he loved and the man she had married. But there was something else. He looked sick.

Locille was direct: "What in the world's the matter with you?"

Egerd grinned. "Don't you know about Med School? It's traditional, hazing freshmen. The usual treatment is a skin fungus that turns sweat rancid, so you stink, or a few drops of something that makes you break out in orange blotches, or—well, never mind. Some of the jokes are kind of, uh, personal."

Locille said angrily: "That's terrible! It isn't a bit funny to me, Egerd!"

Cornut said to her, after Egerd had left, "Boys will be boys." She looked at him swiftly. Cornut knew his tone had been callous. He didn't know that she understood why; he thought his sudden sharp stab of jealousy had been perfectly concealed.

A LITTLE over two weeks after Master Carl's death, the proctor knocked on Cornut's door to say that he had a visitor. It was Sergeant Rhame, with a suitcase full of odds and ends. "Master Carl's personal effects," he said. "They belong to you now. Naturally, we had to borrow them for examination."

Cornut shrugged. The stuff was of no great value. He poked through the suitcase; some shabby toilet articles, a book marked *Diary*—he flipped it open hopefully, but it recorded only demerits and class attendances—an envelope containing photographic film.

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Sergeant Rhame said: "That's what I wanted to ask you about. He had a lot of photographic equipment. We found several packs of film, unopened, which Master Carl had pressed against some kind of radiation-emitting paint on a paper base. The lab spent a lot of time trying to figure it out. They guessed he was trying to get the gamma radiation from the paint to register on the film, but we don't know why."

Cornut said: "Neither do I, but I can make a guess." He told Rhame about Carl's off-duty interests, and the endless laborious work that he had been willing to put into them. "I'm not sure what his present line was, but I know it had something to do with trying to get prints of geometrical figures—stars, circles, that sort of thing. Do you mean he finally succeeded in getting one?"

"Not exactly." Sergeant Rhame opened the package and handed Cornut a glossy print. "All the negatives were blank except one. This one. Make anything of it?"

Cornut studied it. It seemed to be a photograph of a sign or a printer's proof. He puzzled over it for a while, then shook his head.

The lettering on the print said simply:

YOU DAMN OLD FOOL

XI

THE wind was brisk, and the stretched cables under the texas made a bull-roarer sound as they vibrated. The pneumatic generators rattled, whined and crashed. Locille's brother was too used to them to notice.

He was feeling rather poorly, but it was his custom to do what his parents expected him to do, and they expected that he would watch the University broadcasts of his sister's classes. The present class was Cornut's, and Roger eyed with polite ignorance the professor's closely reasoned exposition of Wilson's Theorem. He watched the dancing girls and the animated figures with more interest, but it was, on the whole, a disappointing show. The camera panned the studio audience only twice, and in neither case was he able to catch a glimpse of Locille.

He reported to his mother, took his last look at the flag Locille had brought him, and went to work.

As the day wore on, Roger felt worse. First it was his head pounding, then his bones aching, then an irresistible sudden nausea. Roger's job was conducive to that; he spent the whole day standing thigh-deep in a smelly fluid composed of salt water, fish lymph and blood.

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Ordinarily it didn't bother him (as nothing much bothered him, anyhow). Today was different. He steadied himself with one hand against a steel-topped table, shook his head violently to clear it. He had just come back from a hasty trip to the washroom, where he had vomited. Now it seemed he was close to having to race out there again.

Down the table, the sorter called: "Roger! *Hey!* You're holding up the works."

Roger rubbed the back of his neck and mumbled something that was not intelligible, even to himself. He got back to work because he had to; the fish were piling up.

It was the sorter's job to separate the females of the stocked Atlantic salmon run from the males. The male fish were thrust down a chute to a quick and undistinguished death. But the females, in breeding season, contained something too valuable to be wasted on the mash of entrails and bony parts that made dry fish meal. That was Roger's job—Roger's and a few dozen others who stood at tables just like his.

The first step was to grasp the flopping female by the tail with one hand and club her brains out. The second was to hold her with both hands, exposing her belly to his partner across the table, whose knift ripped open the egg sac inside. (Sometimes the knife missed. Roger's job was not sought after.) A quick wringing motion; the eggs poured one way, the gutted body slid another, and he was ready for the next fish. Even the dullest grew to dislike the work. Roger had held the same job for four years.

"Come on, Roger!" the sorter was yelling at him again.

Roger stared at him woozily. For the first time he became suddenly aware of the constant *slam*, bang, rattle, *roar* that permeated the low-level fishery plant. He opened his mouth to say something, and then he ran. He made it to the washroom, but just barely in time.

AN hour later, his mother was astonished to see him home. "What happened?"

He tried to relate everything that had happened, but it involved some complicated words. He settled for: "I didn't feel good."

She was worried. Roger was always healthy. He didn't look good, ever, but that was because the part of his brain that was damaged had something to do with his muscle tone; but in fact he had been sick hardly a week's total in his life.

She said doubtfully: "Your father will be home in an hour

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or so, but maybe I ought to call him. I wonder. What do you think, Roger?"

That was rhetoric; she had long since reconciled herself to the fact that her son did not think. He stumbled and straightened up, scowling. The back of his neck was beginning to pain badly. He was in no mood to contemplate hard questions. What he wanted was to go to bed, with Locille's flag by his pillow, so that he could fondle it drowsily before he slept. That was what he liked. He told his mother so.

She was seriously concerned now. "You *are* sick. I'd better call the clinic. You go lie down."

"No. No, you don't have to. They called at the place." He swallowed with some pain; he was beginning to shiver. "Mr. Garney took me to the dia — the dia —"

"The diagnosticon at the clinic, Roger."

"Yes, and I got some pills." He reached in his pocket and held up a little box. "I already took one and I have to take some more later."

His mother was not satisfied, but she was no longer very worried; the diagnostic equipment did not often fail. "It's that cold water you stand in," she said, helping him to his room. "I've told you, Roger, you ought to have a better job. Slicer, maybe even sorter. Or maybe you can get out of that part of it altogether. You've worked there enough years . . ."

"Good night," Roger said inappropriately — it was early afternoon. He began to get ready for bed, feeling a little better in the familiar, comfortable room with his familiar, comfortable bed and the little old Japanese flag wadded up by the pillow. "I'm going to sleep now," he told her, and got rid of her at last.

He huddled under the warming covers — set as high as the rheostat would go, but still not high enough to warm his shaking body. The pain in his head was almost blinding now.

At the clinic, Mr. Garney had been painfully careful to explain what the pills were for. They would take away the pain, stop the throbbing, make him comfortable, let him sleep. Feverishly Roger shook another one out of the box and swallowed it.

It worked, of course. The clinic's pills always performed as advertised. The pain dwindled to a bearable ache, then to a memory. The throbbing stopped.

Roger felt drowsily peaceful. He could not see his face and therefore did not know how flushed it was becoming. He had no idea that his temperature was climbing rapidly. He went quite

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happily to sleep — with the old, frayed flag against his cheek — just as he had done for nearly three weeks now, and as he would never in this life do again.

THE reason Roger hadn't seen his sister in the audience was that she wasn't there; she was waiting in Cornut's little dressing room. Cornut suggested it. "You need the rest," he said solicitously, and promised to review the lesson with her later.

Actually he had another motive entirely. As soon as he was off the air, he wrote a note for Locille and gave it to a student to deliver:

There's something I have to do. I'll be gone for a couple of hours. I promise I'll be all right. Don't worry.

Before the note reached her, Cornut was at the bridge, in the elevator, on his way to the city.

He did have something to do and he did not want to talk to Locille about it. The odd dreams had been worsening, and there had been other things. He nearly always had a hangover now, for instance. He had found that a few drinks at night made him sleep better and he had come to rely on them.

And there was something else about which he could not talk to Locille at all because she would not talk.

The monotrack let him out far downtown, in a bright, noisy, stuffy underground station. He paused at a phone booth to check the address of the sexwriter, Farley, and hurried up to street level, anxious to get away from the smell and noise. That was a mistake. In the open, the noise pounded more furiously, the air was even more foul. Great cubical blocks of buildings rose over him; small three-wheeled cars and large commercial vehicles pounded on two levels around him. It was only a minute's walk to Farley's office, but the minute was an ordeal.

The sign on the door was the same as the lettering on his folder:

S. R. Farley

Consultant

The sexwriter's secretary looked very doubtful, but finally reported that Mr. Farley would be able to see Master Cornut without an appointment.

Cornut went in, sat across the desk, refused a cigarette and said directly: "I've studied the sample scripts you left for us, Farley. They're interesting, though I don't believe I'll require your services in future. I think I've

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grasped the notation, and I find that there is one page of constants which seems to describe the personality of my wife and myself."

"Oh, yes. Very important," said Farley. "Yours is incomplete — I had no real opportunity to interview you — but I secured your personnel-file data, the profile from the Med Center and so on."

"Good. Now I have a question to ask you."

Cornut hesitated. The proper way to ask the question was to say: "I suspect, from a hazy, sleepy recollection, that the other morning I made a rather odd suggestion to my wife." That was the proper way, but it was embarrassing, and it also involved a probability of having to reveal how many rather odd things he had done, some of them nearly fatal, in those half-waking moments . . .

"Let me borrow a piece of paper," he said instead, and rapidly sketched in a line of symbols. Stating the problem in terms of ♂ and ♀ made it vastly less embarrassing. He shoved it across the desk to the sexwriter. "What would you say to this? Does it fit in with your profile of our personalities?"

Farley studied the line and raised his eyebrows. "Absolutely not!" he said. "You wouldn't think of it and she wouldn't accept it!"

"You could say it was an objectionable thing?"

"*Master Cornut!* Don't use moralistic terms! What is customary and moral in one place is—"

"Please, Mr. Farley. In terms of our own personalities—you have them sketched out on the profile—this would be objectionable?"

The sexwriter laughed. "More than that, Master Cornut. It would be absolutely impossible."

Cornut took a deep breath. "But suppose," he said after a moment, "I told you that I had proposed this to my wife."

Farley drummed his fingers on the desk. "Then I can only say that other factors are involved."

"Like what?"

Farley said seriously: "You must be trying to drive her away from you."

IN the two blocks between Farley's office and the monotrack station entrance, Cornut saw three men killed; a turbotruck on the upper traffic level seemed to stagger, grazed another vehicle and shot through the guard rail, killing its driver and two pedestrians.

It was a shocking interpolation of violence into Cornut's

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academic life, but it seemed quite in keeping with the rest of his day. His own life was rapidly going as badly out of control as the truck.

You must be trying to drive her away from you.

Cornut boarded his train, hardly noticing, thinking hard. He didn't *want* to drive Locille away!

But he also did not *want* to kill himself, and yet there was no doubt that he had kept trying. It was all part of a pattern and there could be no doubt of its sum: He was trying to destroy himself in every way. Failing to end his life, that destroyer inside himself was trying to end the part of his life that had grown to mean most to him, his love for Locille. And yet it was the same thing really, he thought, for with Locille gone, Carl dead, Egerd transferred, he would have no one close to him to help him through the dangerous half-awake moments that came at least twice in every twenty-four hours.

He would not last a day.

He slumped back into his seat, with the first sensation of despair he had ever felt. One part of his mind said judgmatically: "It's too bad."

Another part entirely was taking in his surroundings. Even in his despair, the novelty of being among so many non-University people made an impression. They seemed so tired and angry, he thought abstractedly; one or two even looked sick. He wondered if any of them had ever known the helplessness of being under siege from the most insidious enemy of all, himself.

But suppose Master Carl was right after all, said Cornut to himself, quite unexpectedly—what if he was right?

The thought startled Cornut. It came through without preamble, and if there had been a train of rumination that caused it, he had forgotten its existence. Right? Right about what?

The PA system murmured that the next stop was his. Cornut got up absently, thinking. Right?

He had doubted that Master Carl had really tried to kill St. Cyr. But the evidence was against Carl. The police lab had verified his fingerprints on the axe, and they could not have been deceived.

So suppose Carl really had picked up the weapon to split the old man's skull. Incredible! But *if* he had . . . and *if* Carl had not merely gone into an aberrated senile rage . . .

Why, then, said Cornut to himself, emerging from the elevator at the base of the bridge pier and blinking at the familiar

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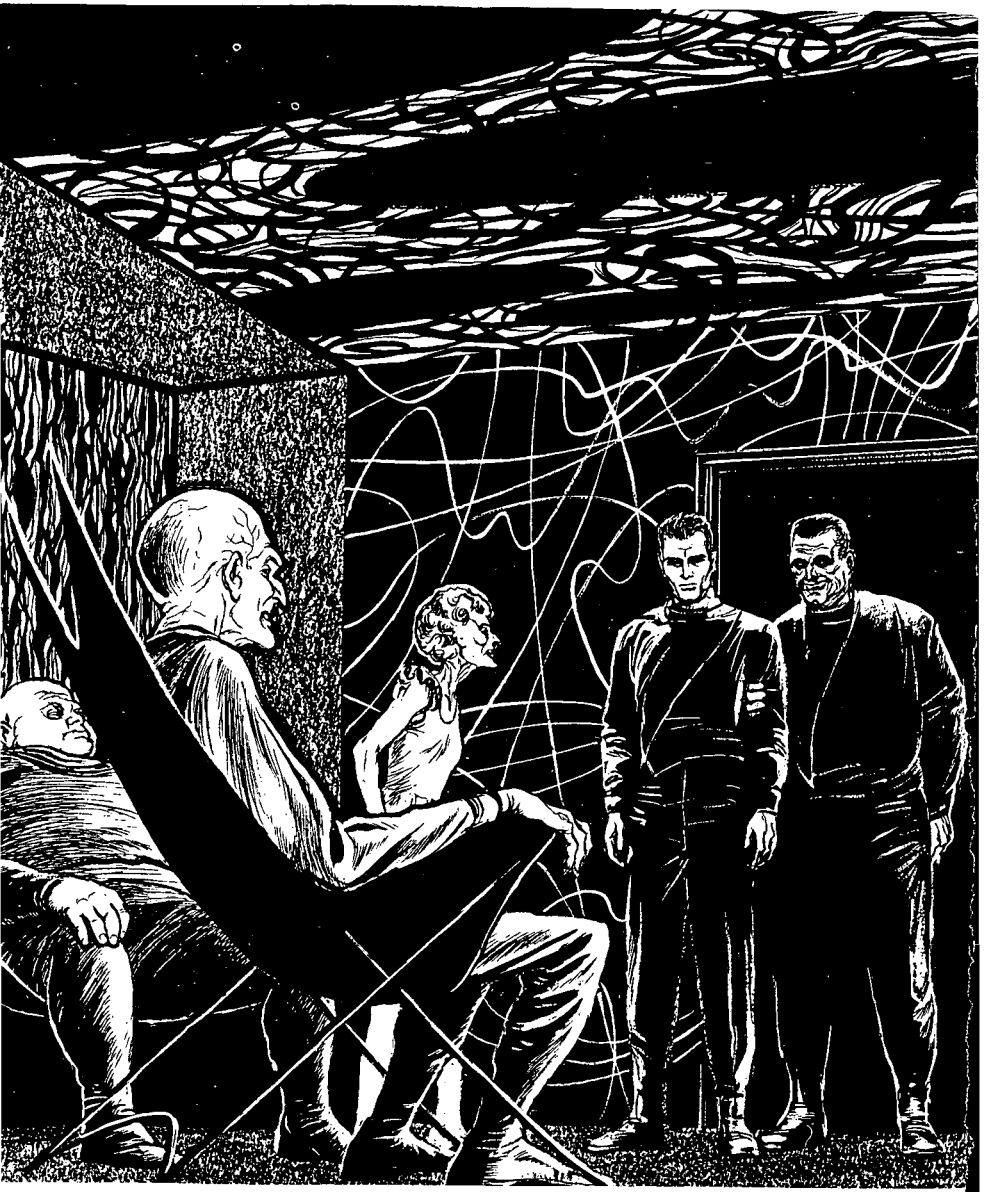

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campus, perhaps he had a reason. Perhaps St. Cyr needed killing.

XII

ENTERING the room was like being plunged under the surface of the sea. The lights were blue-green, concealed and reflecting from blue-green walls. A spidery mural of blue and green lines covered one wall like a wave pattern. From boxes along the floor, great curving branches of pale plants from the hybridization farms rose, resembling the kelp of the mermaid forests.

The pelagic motif was not a matter of design; it was only that these shapes and these colors were the ones that most pleased and comforted President St. Cyr. This was his room. Not his study, with its oak panels and ancient armor; not even the "private" drawing room where he sometimes entertained members of the faculty. This was the room he reserved for a very, very few.

Four of these few were present now. A fat man, gross arms quivering, turned himself around and said, "When?" He said, "Do you want us all?" He said, "That's Jillson's job."

St. Cyr grinned and, after a moment, his bodyguard said, "No, I don't. Really. You enjoy it more than I do."

A woman in a preposterously young frock opened her thin-lipped mouth and cackled hilariously when there was a knock on the door.

Jillson, the bodyguard, opened it and revealed St. Cyr's thin, silent housekeeper with Master Cornut.

St. Cyr, on a turquoise wing chair, raised a hand. Jillson took Master Cornut by the arm and led him in, the door behind him closing on the housekeeper.

"Mas-ter Cor-nut," said St. Cyr in his odd, uninflected voice. "I have been wait-ing for you."

The old woman in the young dress laughed shrilly for no visible reason. The bodyguard smiled. The fat man chuckled.

Cornut could not help, even then, looking around this room where he had never been. It was cool—the air was kept a full dozen degrees under the usual room temperature Cornut liked. There was a muted muttering of music in the background, too low to distinguish a tune. And these people—were odd.

He ignored Jillson, the assassin of Master Carl, whom he remembered from the inquest. The fat man blinked at him. "Sen-a-tor Dane," said St. Cyr. "And Miss May Kerbs."

Miss May Kerbs was the one

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who had laughed. She swayed over to Cornut, looking like a teen-age girl in her first party formal.

"We were talking about you," she said shrilly, and Cornut, with a physical shock, recognized that this was no teenager.

SHE suddenly resembled the woman from South America whom he had met on the Field Expedition; the features were not much alike, but their state of repair was identical. The face was a skull's face under the makeup. She was fifty if she was a day — no, seventy-five — no, she was older than that. She was older than he liked to think, for a woman who dressed like a brash young girl.

Cornut found himself acknowledging the introductions. Talking about him? What had they been saying?

"We knew you'd be here, pal," said the assassin, Jillson, kindly. "You think we murdered the kid."

"The kid?"

"Master Carl," said Jillson, not quite in a stammer.

He had a reason, said a thought in Cornut's mind. Queerly, it came in the half-stammering accent of Jillson.

"But sit down, Mas-ter Cornut." St. Cyr gestured.

Invitingly, the woman plumped cushions of aqua and turquoise on a divan.

"I don't want to sit down!"

"No. But please do." St. Cyr's blue-tinged face was only polite.

The fat man wheezed, "Too bad, youngster. We didn't want to poke him along. I mean, why bother? But he was a nuisance. Every year," he expanded cheerily, "we get maybe half a dozen who really make nuisances of themselves, mostly like you, some like him. His trouble was going after the classified material in the Stacks. Well," he said, severely waving a fat finger, "that material is classified for a reason."

Cornut sat down at last because he couldn't help himself. It was not going at all as he had expected; they were not denying a thing. But to admit that they killed Carl to protect some unimportant statistic in the census figures?

It made no sense!

The blonde laughed piercingly.

"Forgive Miss Kerbs," said the fat man. "She thinks you are funny for presuming to judge whether or not our actions are sensible. Believe me, young man, they are."

Cornut found that he was grinding his teeth. These one-sided conversations, the answers coming before the questions

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were spoken, these queer half-understood remarks . . .

It was as though they knew every thought he had.

It was as though they were — but no, it couldn't be! Carl had proved it!

The damn old fool.

Cornut jumped. The thought was in the tones of the fat man's wheeze, and he remembered where he had seen words like that before.

The fat man nodded, his chins pulsing like a floating jellyfish. "We exposed his photographic plate for him," he chuckled. "Oh, yes. It was only a joke, but we knew he would not live to make trouble over it. Once he had the Wolgren analysis, he would have to be helped along." He said politely, "Too bad, because we wanted him to publish his proof that telepathy was impossible. Quite true, it is. For him. But not for us. And unfortunately not, my young friend, for you."

LOCILLE woke shivering, reaching out at once to Cornut's side of the bed; but he was not in it.

She turned on the room lights and scanned the nearest of the battery of clocks; one o'clock in the morning.

Locille got up, looked out the window, listened at the hall door, turned on the broadcast radio, shook the speaker-mike of the University annunciator to make sure it was working, checked the telephone to see that it was not unhooked, sat down on the side of the bed and, finally, began silently to shake. She was frightened.

Whatever compulsion drove Cornut to try suicide had never before stricken him when he was wide-awake and in possession of his thoughts. Was that no longer true? But if it was still true, *why* had he gone off like that?

The radio was whispering persuasively its stream of news bulletins: Strikes in Gary, Indiana, a wreck of a cargo rocket, three hundred cases of Virus Gamma in one twelve-hour period, a catastrophic accident between a nuclear trawler and a texas (she listened briefly, then relaxed) off the coast of Haiti. Because it did not mention Cornut's name, she heard very little. Where could he be?

When the telephone sounded, she answered it at once.

It was not Cornut; it was the rough, quick voice of a busy man. "— asked me to call. She is with your brother. Can you come?"

"My mother asked you to call?"

Impatiently: "That's what I said. Your brother is seriously ill." The voice did not hesitate.

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"It is likely that he will die within the next few hours. Good-by."

Locille dressed swiftly. She left urgent instructions with the night-proctor on what to do when — not if; *when* — Cornut returned. Watch him asleep; keep the door open; check him every half hour; be with him when he wakes.

"Yes, ma'am," said the student, and then, with gentleness, "He'll be all right."

But would he? Locille hurried across the campus, closing her mind to that question. It was too late for a ferry from the island. She would have to go to the bridge, ride to the city, hope for a helipopper ferry to the texas from there. The Med Center was bright with lights from many rooms; curious, she thought, and hurried by. In their wired enclosure, the aboriginals were murmuring, not asleep. Curious again.

But suppose the proctor forgot?

Locille reassured herself that he would not forget; he was one of Cornut's own students. In any case, she had to take the chance. She was almost grateful that something was making her leave, for the waiting had been unbearable.

She walked by the president's residence with the barest glance; that it, too, was lighted was of no relevance to her own problems, she thought. In this she was wrong.

It was not until she was actually boarding the monotrack that realization of where she was going and why finally struck her. Roger! He was *dying.*

She began to weep, for Roger, for the missing Cornut, for herself.

AT that moment, Cornut, sore-eyed, was picking himself up from the floor. Over him stood Jillson, holding a club wrapped with a wet cloth. Cornut was aching as he had never imagined he could. He mumbled: "You don't have to hit me any more."

"Per-haps we do," said St. Cyr from his blue-green throne. "We do not like this, you know, but we must."

"Speak for yourself," said Jillson, and the ancient blonde screeched with laughter. They were talking among themselves, Cornut realized; he could hear only the aural part, but they were joking, commenting . . . they were having a fine old time, while this methodical maniac bludgeoned him.

The fat senator wheezed: "Understand our position, Cornut. We aren't cruel. We don't kill you shorties for nothing. But we aren't human and we can't be

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judged by human laws . . . All right, Jillson."

The bodyguard brought the club down and Cornut sank against the cushions the thoughtful old blonde kept repiling for him. What made it particularly bad was that the senator held a gun.

The first time Cornut was beaten, he had fought, but then the senator had held him at gunpoint while Jillson systematically battered him. And all the time they kept talking!

St. Cyr said mildly: "Stop."

It was time for another break. That had been the fifth beating in six or seven hours, and in between they had interrogated him.

"Tell us what you un-der-stand, Cor-nut."

The club had taught him obedience. "You are a worldwide organization," he recited, "of the next species after humanity. I understand that. You need to survive and it doesn't matter if the rest of us don't. Through your telepathic abilities you can suggest suicide to some persons who have the power in a latent form —"

Thud.

"An a-bort-ed form," corrected St. Cyr as Cornut struggled erect again after the blow.

He coughed and saw blood on the back of his hand. But he only said: "An aborted form. Like myself."

"Abortions of mutations," chuckled the senator. "Unsuccessful attempts on the part of nature to create others like ourselves."

"Yes. Abortions of mutations, unsuccessful attempts. That is what I am," Cornut parroted. "And — and you are able to suggest many things, as long as the subject has the — the abortive talent, and as long as you are able to reach his mind when it is not fully awake."

The blonde said, "Very good! You're an apt learner, Cornut. But telepathy is only a fringe benefit. Do you know what it is that makes us *really* different?"

He cringed away from Jillson as he shook his head.

The bodyguard glanced at the woman, shrugged and said, "All right, I won't if you say so. Go ahead."

"What it is that makes us different is our age, my dear boy." She giggled shrilly. "For example, I am two hundred and eighty-three years old."

THEY fed him after a while and let him rest.

Although he ached in every cell, there was hardly a mark on him; that was the reason for padding the club. And that had a meaning, too, Cornut thought

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painfully. If they didn't want to mark him, then they realized that he would be seen. Which meant that, at least, they weren't going to kill him out of hand and bury him somewhere.

Two hundred and eighty-three years old.

And yet she was the next to youngest of the four of them; Jillson was only a century or so old. The senator had been born while America was still a British colony. St. Cyr had been born in Louis Napoleon's France.

The whole key had been in the restricted areas of the Stacks, for the anomaly in the Wolgren application was not Wolgren's fault at all. What the data would have shown was a failure of some people to die. Statistically insignificant for thousands of years, that fraction had grown and grown in the last two or three centuries — since Lister, since Pasteur, since Fleming. They were immortal not because they could not become diseased or succumb to a wound, but because they would not otherwise die.

WITH the growth of preventive medicine, they had begun to assert their power. They were not wiser than the rest of humanity or stronger. Even their telepathy was, it seemed unique only because the short-lived human had not the time to develop it; it depended on intricate and slow-forming neuronic hookups. Everything that made them powerful was only the gift of time.

They had money. But who, given a century or two of compound interest, could not be as rich as he choose? They had furthered many a war, for what greater boon than war is there to medical science? They had endowed countless foundations, for the surgery of the short-lived could help preserve their own infinitely more valuable lives. And they had only contempt for the short-lived who fed them, served them and made their lives possible.

They *had* to be a closed corporation. Even an immortal needs friends, and the ordinary humans could for them be nothing more than weekend guests.

Contempt . . . and fear. There were the Cornuts, they told him, who had a rudimentary telepathic sense, who could not be allowed to live to develop it. Suggest killing and the short-lived one died; it was that easy. The sleeping mind can build a dream out of a closing door, a distant truck's exhaust. The half-awake mind can convert that dream into action . . .

He heard a shrill laugh and the door opened. Jillson came in

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first. "No!" cried Cornut, bracing himself against the club.

XIII

LOCILLE sat next to her mother in the hospital's cafeteria, grateful that at last they had found a place to sit down. The hospital on the texas was unusually busy, worried visitors occupying every inch of space in the waiting room, the halls outside the reception area, even the glassed-in sundeck that hung over the angry waves and was normally used for the comfort of the patients during the day. It was very late and the cafeteria should have been closed, but the hospital had opened it for coffee and very little else.

Her mother said something, but Locille only nodded. She hadn't heard. It was not easy to hear, with the loud bull-roarer *twangg* of the suspended cables from the texas droning at them. And she had, besides, been thinking mostly of Cornut.

There had been no fresh news from the night-proctor on the phone; Cornut still had not returned.

"He ate so well," her mother said suddenly.

Locille patted her hand. The coffee was cold, but she drank it anyhow. The doctor knew where to find her, she thought, though of course he would be busy . . .

"He was the best of my babies," said her mother.

Locille knew that it was very close to ending for her brother. The rash that baffled the medics, the fever that glazed his eyes — these were only the outward indicators of a terrible battle inside his motionless body; they represented the fact of blood and pain and death, but they were not the fact itself. Roger was dying. The outward indicators had been controlled, but salve could only dry up the pustulant sores, pills could only calm his breathing, shots could only ease the pain in his head.

"He ate so well," her mother dreamed aloud, "and he talked at eighteen months. He had a little elephant with a music box and he could wind it up."

"Don't worry," said Locille worriedly.

"But we let him go swimming," sighed her mother, looking around the crowded room. It was she, not Locille, who first saw the nurse coming toward them through the crowd, and she must have known as soon as Locille, from the look on the nurse's face, what the message would be.

"He was the tenth today," whispered the nurse, after look-

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ing for a private place to tell them and not finding it. "He never regained consciousness."

CORNUT walked out of the residence, blinking. It was morning. "Nice day," he said politely to Jillson, beside him. Jillson nodded. He was pleased with Cornut. The kid wasn't going to give them any trouble.

As they walked, Jillson "shouted" in Cornut's mind. It was hard with these half-baked telepaths, but it was part of his job. He was the executioner. *You need to die. You'll kill yourself.*

"Oh, yes," said Cornut, aloud. He was surprised. He'd promised, hadn't he? He bore no resentment for the beating. He understood that it had a purpose; the more dazed, the more exhausted he was, the surer their control of him. He had no objection at all to being under the control of four ancient immortals.

You die, Cornut, but what difference does it make? Today, tomorrow, fifty years from now. It's all the same.

"That's right," Cornut agreed politely. He was not very interested. The subject had been thoroughly covered, all night long.

He noticed absently that there was a considerable crowd around the Med Center. The whole campus seemed somehow uneasy.

They crossed under the shadow of the Administration Building and circled around it, toward Math Tower.

You will die, you know, shouted Jillson. *One day the world will wake up and no Cornut. Put a stethoscope to his poor chest, no heartbeats. The sound of a beating heart that you have heard every day of your life will never be heard again.*

Cornut was embarrassed. These things were true; he did not mind being told them, but it was certainly rather immature of Jillson to take such evident pleasure in them.

The brain turns into jelly, chanted Jillson gleefully. *The body turns into slime.* He licked his lips, hot-eyed.

Cornut looked about him, anxious to change the subject. "Isn't that Sergeant Rhame?"

Jillson pounded on: *The hangnail on your thumb that hurts now will dissolve and rot and molder. Not even the pain will ever be thought of by any living human again. Your bedgirl, is there anything you ever put off telling her? You never will now.*

"It is Sergeant Rhame. Sergeant!"

Damn! crashed a thought in Cornut's mind; but Jillson was

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smiling, smiling. "Hello, Sergeant," he said with his voice, his mind raging.

IF Cornut had known how, he would have helped Jillson along, but his half-dazed condition robbed him of enterprise. Too bad, he thought consolingly, hoping that Jillson would pick up the thought. I know St. Cyr ordered you to stay with me until I was dead, but don't worry. I'll kill myself.

I promise.

Sergeant Rhame was talking gruffly to Jillson about the mob at Med Center. Cornut wished Rhame would go away. He understood that Rhame was a danger to the immortals; they could not be involved with the same people in violent deaths. Rhame had investigated the death of Master Carl at Jillson's hands; he could not now be allowed to investigate even the suicide of Master Cornut, when he had seen Jillson with him going to his death. Jillson would have to leave him now. Too bad. It was so right, Cornut thought, that he should die for the sake of preserving the safety of the immortals. He knew this; they had told him so themselves.

Something caught his attention: "— since the sickness began they've been mobbing every hospital," Sergeant Rhame was saying to Jillson, waving at the mob before Med Center.

"Sickness?" asked Cornut. He stared at the policeman. It was as though Rhame had said, "I've got to get some garlic. There are vampires loose tonight." Sickness was a relic of the dark ages. You could have a headache or a queasy stomach, yes, but you went to the clinic and the diagnosticon did the rest.

Rhame grumbled, "Where've you been, Master Cornut? Nearly a thousand deaths in this area alone. Mobs seeking immunization. It's smallpox, they think."

"Smallpox?" Even more fantastic! Cornut knew the word only as an archeological medical relic.

"Accidents all over the city," said Rhame, and Cornut thought suddenly of the crash he had seen. "Fever and rash and — hell, I don't know what all the symptoms are. But it's fatal. The — the medics don't seem to have a cure."

"Me disfella smellim," said a voice from behind Rhame. "Him spoilim fes distime. Plantim manyfella pox." It was one of the aboriginals, quietly observing while Rhame's police squad erected barricades in front of their enclosure. "Plantim mefella Mary," he added sadly.

Rhame said, "Understand any

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of it? It's English, if you listen close. Pidgin. He's been saying they know about smallpox. He said his wife died of it."

"Plantim mefella Mary," agreed the aboriginal in a melancholy voice.

Rhame said, "Unfortunately, I think he's right. Looks like your Field Expedition brought a lot of trouble back with it; the focus of infection seems to vector from these people. Look at their faces."

Cornut looked. The broad, dark cheeks were waffled with old pitted scars.

"So we're trying to keep the mob from making trouble here," said Sergeant Rhame, "by putting a fence around them."

Cornut was even more incredulous than before. Mob violence?

It was not really his problem . . . since he would have no more problems in the world. He nodded politely to Rhame, conspiratorially to Jillson, and moved on toward Math Tower. The aboriginal yelled something after him — "Waitimup mefella Masatura-san! He speak you!" — it sounded like. Cornut paid no attention.

Jillson "yelled" after him too. *Don't forget! You must die!* Cornut turned and nodded. Of course he had to die. It was only right.

FORTUNATELY Locille was not in the room. Cornut felt, and quelled, a swift reeling sense of horror at the thought of losing her. It was only an emotion, though, and he was its master.

Probably Pithecanthropus had had similar emotions, he thought, casting about for a convenient way to die.

He made sure his door was locked and decided to treat himself to a farewell drink. He found a bottle, poured, toasted the air and said aloud: "To the next species." Then he buckled down to work.

The idea of dying is never far from the mind of any mortal, but Cornut had not viewed it as anything up close in the foreground of his future. It was curiously alarming. Everybody did it, he assured himself. (Well, almost everybody.) Why did it seem so hard?

As Cornut was a methodical man, he sat down at his desk and began to make a list, headed:

MEANS OF DEATH

1. *Poison.*
2. *Slash wrists.*
3. *Jump from window. (Or bridge.)*
4. *Electrocution.*

He paused. Electrocution? It didn't sound so bad, especially considering that he had already tried most of the others, helped

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along by the insistent siren voice of the immortals in his brain. It would be nice to try something new.

He poured himself another drink to think about it and began to hum. He was feeling quite peaceful.

"It's only right that I should die," he said. "Naturally. Are you listening, Jillson?" He couldn't tell, of course, but probably they were.

And maybe they were worried. That was a saddening thought; he didn't want the immortals to worry about him.

"I understand perfectly," he said out loud. "I hope you hear me. I'm in your way." He paused, not aware that he had raised a lectorial finger. "It is like this. Suppose I had terminal cancer. Suppose St. Cyr and I were in a shipwreck and there was only one lifebelt. He has a life ahead of him; I have at best a week of pain. Who gets the lifebelt?" He shook the finger. "St. Cyr does!" he thundered. "And this is the same case. I have a mortal disease, humanity. And it's their lives or mine!"

He poured another drink and decided that the truths that had been whipped into him were too great to lose. The sheet of paper with suicide possibilities fell unheeded to the floor. Humming, he wrote:

We are children and the immortals are fully grown. Like children, we need their knowledge. They lead us; they direct our universities and plan our affairs; they have the wisdom of centuries and without them we would be lost, random particles, statistical chaos. But we are dangerous children, so they must remain secret and those who guess must die . . .

HE crumpled the piece of paper angrily. He had nearly spoiled everything! He saw all the more clearly why he had to die to protect their secret. He scrambled on the floor for the list of suicide possibilities, but stopped, bent over, staring at the floor.

The truth was that he didn't like any of them.

He sat up and poured a drink. He couldn't rely on himself to do a good job, he grumbled to himself. Slashing his wrists, for example. Someone might come; and what could be more annoying than waking up on an operating table with sutures in his veins and the whole damned thing to do over again?

He noticed that his glass was again empty, but didn't bother to refill it. He was feeling quite sufficiently alcoholic already. If it weren't for his own confounded human ineptitude, he

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could be feeling pretty good, in fact, for it was nice to know that in a very short time he would be serving the best interests of the world by dying. Very nice. . .

He got up and wandered to the window, beaming. Outside, the mobs were still swarming, trying to get immunization at the Med Center. Poor fools. He was *so* much better off than they!

"Strike the twos and strike the threes," he sang. "The Sieve of — say!"

He had an idea. How fine it was, he thought gratefully, to have the wise helping hand of an elder friend in a time like this. He didn't have to worry about how to die or whether he'd make a mess of it. He needed only to give St. Cyr and the others a chance. Just relax . . . let himself get drowsy . . . even more drunk, perhaps. They would do the rest.

"The Sieve of Eratosthenes," he sang cheerfully. "When the multiples sublime, the numbers that are left are prime!" He stumbled over to his bed and sprawled on it.

After a moment he got up, angrily. He wasn't being a bit fair. If it was difficult for him to find a convenient way of dying in his room, why should he impose that problem on his good liege, St. Cyr?

He was extremely irritated with himself over that; but, picking up the bottle, marching out into the hall, singing as he looked for a conveniently fatal spot, he gradually began to feel very good again.

SERGEANT Rhame tested the barricades in front of the aboriginal enclosure and sent his men back to trying to control the mobs at Med Center. All the time his squad was working, the aboriginals had been trying to talk to them in their odd pidgin, but the police were too busy. The one who spoke English at all well, Masatura-san, was in his hut; the others were almost incomprehensible.

Rhame glanced at his watch and decided that he had time for a quick cup of coffee before going over to help his men with the crowd. Although, he thought, it might be kinder to leave the crowd alone to crush half its members to death. At least it would be quick. And the private information of the police department surgeon was that the inoculations were not very effective. . .

He turned, startled, as a girl's voice called him.

It was Locille, weeping. "Please, can you help me? Cornut's gone, and my brother's dead, and — I found this." She

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held out the sheet with Cornut's carefully lettered list of suicide possibilities.

The fact that Rhame had been taken from his computer studies to help hold a mob down was evidence enough that he really belonged there; but he hesitated and was lost. Individual misery was that much more persuasive than mass panic.

He began with the essentials: "Where is he? No idea at all? No note? Any witnesses who might have seen him go? You didn't ask? *Why* — " But he had no time to ask why she had failed to question witnesses; he knew that every moment Cornut was off by himself was very possibly the moment in which he would die.

They found the student proctor, jumpy and distracted but still somewhere near his post. And he had seen Cornut!

"He was kind of crazy, I thought. I tried to tell him something—you know Egerd, used to be in his class?" (He knew perfectly just how well Locille had known Egerd.) "He died this morning. I thought Master Cornut would be interested, but he didn't even hear when I told him."

Rhame observed the expression on Locille's face, but there was no time to worry about her feeling for a dead under-graduate. "Which way? When?"

Cornut had gone down the corridor more than half an hour before. They followed.

Locille said miserably: "It's a miracle he's alive at all! But if he lasted this long . . . and I was just a few minutes late . . ."

"Shut up," the policeman said harshly, and called out to another undergraduate.

Trailing Cornut was easy; he had been conspicuous by his wild behavior even on that panicky day. A few yards from the faculty refectory, they heard raucous singing.

"It's Cornut!" cried Locille, and raced ahead. Rhame caught her at the door of the kitchens where she had worked so many months.

Cornut was staggering about, singing in a slurred howl one of Master Carl's favorite tunes:

Add ray to modul, close th' set
To adding, subtracting—

He stumbled against a cutting table and swore good-naturedly.

Produce a new system, an' this goddam thing
Is gen'rally termed a (hic) *ring!*

In one hand he had a sharp knife, filched from the meat-cutter's drawer; he waved it, marking time.

"Come on, damn it!" he cried, laughing. "Poke me along!"

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"Save him!" cried Locille, and started to run to him, but Rhame grabbed her arm. "Let go of me! He might kill himself with that knife!"

Cornut didn't even hear them; he was singing again. Rhame said at last: "But he isn't doing it, you see, and he's had plenty of time, by the look of the place. Maybe I'm wrong, Locille, but it looks to me as if he's not suicidal—just blind drunk."

XIV

THROUGHOUT the city and elsewhere there were scenes like the one in front of Med Center, as a populace panicked by the apparition of pestilence—vanished these centuries! —scrambled for the amulet that would guard them against it. Hardly one in a couple of hundred was seriously ill, but that was enough. Half of one per cent of billions is millions—millions of cases of the most deadly, most contagious and least excusable disease in medicine. For smallpox can infallibly be prevented, and only a world which had forgotten Jenner could have been taken by it unaware . . . or a world in which the memory of Jenner's centuries-old cure had been systematically removed.

In the highest tower of Port Monmouth, the eight major television networks shared joint transmitter - repeater facilities. Equatorially mounted wire saucers scanned the sky for the repeater satellites. As each satellite in its orbit broke free of the horizon, a saucer hunted and found it. That saucer clung to it as it traversed the sky, breaking free and commencing the search pattern for a new one as the old one dipped beneath the curve of the Earth again. There were more than sixty satellites circling the Earth which the repeaters could use, each one specially launched and instrumented to receive, amplify and rebroadcast the networks' programs.

Sam Gensel was senior shift engineer for the all-network technical crew at Port Monmouth.

It was not up to him to go out and get the pictures, to stage the shows or to decide what went out on the air. Lecturing math professors, dimple-kneed dancers, sobbing soap-opera heroines—he saw all of them on the banked row of monitors in his booth, yet he saw none of them. They were only pictures. What he really liked was test patterns; they showed more of what he wanted to see. He watched for ripples of poor phasing, drifts off center, the electronic snowstorm of line failure. If the picture was

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clear, he hardly noticed what it represented . . . except tonight.

Tonight he was white-faced.

"Chief," moaned the rabbity junior engineer from Net Five, "it's all over the country! Sacramento just came in. And the relay from Rio has a local collect that shows trouble all over South America."

"Watch your monitor," Gensel ordered, turning away. It was very important that he keep a clear head, he told himself. Unfortunately the head that he had to keep clear was aching fiercely.

"I'm going to get an aspirin," he growled to his line man, a thirty-year veteran whose hands, tonight, were trembling. Gensel filled a paper cup of water and swallowed two aspirins, sighed and sat down at the coffee-ringed desk in the office he seldom had time to use.

One of the monitors showed an announcer whose smile was desperate as he read a newscast:

"—disease fails to respond to any of the known antibiotics. All persons are cautioned to stay indoors as much as possible. Large gatherings are forbidden. All schools are closed until further notice. It is strongly urged that even within families personal contact be avoided as much as possible. And, above all, the Department of Public Health urges that everyone wait until an orderly program of immunization can be completed."

GENSEL turned his back on the monitor and picked up the phone. He dialed the front office. "Mr. Tremonte, please. Gensel here. Operational emergency priority."

The girl was businesslike and efficient (but did her voice have a faint hysterical tremor?). "Yes, sir. Mr. Tremonte is at his home. I will relay."

Click, click. The picture whirred, blurred, went to black. Then it came on again. Old man Tremonte was slouched at ease in a great leather chair, staring out at him irritably; the flickering light on his face showed that he was sitting by his fireplace. "Well?"

That queer, thin voice. Gensel had always, as a matter of employee discipline, stepped down hard on the little jokes about the Old Man—he had transistors instead of tonsils; his wife didn't put him to bed at night, she turned him off. But there was something creepy about the slow, mechanical way he talked, and that old, lined face!

Gensel said rapidly: "Sir, every net is carrying interrupt news bulletins. The situation is getting bad. Net Five canceled the sports roundup, Seven ran an old tape of Bubbles Brinkhouse —the word is he's dying. I want

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permission to go over to emergency procedure. Cancel all shows, pool the nets for news and civil-defense instructions."

Old man Tremonte rubbed his thin, long nose and abruptly laughed, like a store-window Santa. "Gensel, boy," he rasped, "don't get upset over a few sniffly noses. You're dealing with an essential public service."

"Sir, there are people sick, dying!"

Tremonte said slowly: "That leaves a lot who aren't. We'll continue with our regular programs—and, Gensel, I'm going away for a few days; I expect you to be in charge. I do not give you permission to go over to emergency procedure," and he cut the contact.

I never got a chance to tell him about the remote from Philadelphia, thought Gensel despairingly, thinking of the trampled hundreds at the Municipal Clinic.

He felt his warm forehead and decided cloudily that what he really needed was a couple more aspirin . . . although the last two, for some reason, hadn't agreed with him. Not at all. In fact, he felt rather queasy.

Definitely queasy.

At the console, the line man saw his chief gallop clumsily toward the men's washroom, one hand pressed to his mouth.

The line man grinned. Fifteen minutes later, though, he was not grinning at all. That was when the Net Three audio man came running in to report that the chief was out cold, breathing like a broken-down steam boiler, on the washroom floor.

CORNUT, with black coffee in him, was beginning to come back to something resembling normal functioning.

He heard Rhame talking to Locille: "What he really needs is massive vitamin injections. That would snap him right around — but you've seen what the Med Center looks like. We'll have to wait until he sobers up."

"I am sober," said Cornut feebly, but he knew it was untrue. "What happened?"

He listened while they told him what had been going on in the past twenty-four hours. Locille's brother dead, Egerd dead, plague loose in the land . . . the world had become a different place.

He heard and was affected, but there was enough liquor in him and enough of the high-pressure compulsion exercised by the immortals so that he was able to view this new world objectively. Too bad. But he felt shame—*why* had he failed to kill himself?

Locille's hand was in his, and

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Cornut, looking at her, never wanted to let it go again. He had not died when he should have, and now he wanted to live. It was shameful, but he could not deny it.

The liquor in him gave the world a warm, fresh appearance. He still was ashamed, but the feeling was remote; it was a failure of his childhood, bad, but so long ago. Meanwhile he was warm and comfortable.

"Please drink some more coffee," said Locille, and he was happy to oblige her.

All the stimuli of twenty-four full hours were working on him at once, the beating, the strain, the compulsion of the immortals, the liquor.

He caught a glimpse of Locille's expression and realized he had been humming.

"Sorry," he said, and held out his cup for more coffee.

AROUND the texas, the waves were growing higher. The black barges tossed like chips. Locille's parents braved the wind-blown rain topside to witness the solemn lowering of their son's casket into the black-decked funeral barge. They were not alone—there were other mourners with them, strangers—and it was not quiet. *Dwang-g-g* went the bullroarer vibration of the steel cables. Hutch-*chumpf*, hutch-*chumpf*, the pneumatic pens in the tower's legs caught trapped air from the waves and valved it into the pressure tanks for the generators. The noise nearly drowned out the sound of the music.

It was the custom to play solemn music at funerals, from tapes kept in the library for the purpose. The bereft were privileged to choose the program—hymns for the religious, chorales for the classicists, largos for the merely mourning. Today no choice was offered. The audio speakers played without end, a continuous random selection of dirges. There were too many mourners watching their children, parents or wives being winched onto the tossing barges, on their way to the deep-sea funerary drop.

Six, seven . . . Locille's father carefully counted eight barges lying along the texas, waiting to be loaded. Each one held a dozen bodies. It was a bad sickness, he thought with detachment, realizing that the bodies outnumbered the mourners because, often enough, whole families were being put aboard the barge together.

He rubbed the back of his neck, which had begun to hurt. The mother standing beside him neither thought nor counted, only wept.

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WHEN Cornut sobered, he began to view his world and his past day in harsher, clearer perspective. Rhame helped. The policeman had the scraps of paper Cornut had left and he was remorseless in questioning. "*Why* must you die? *Who* are the immortals? *How* did they make you try to kill yourself—and why didn't you this last time, with every chance in the world?"

Cornut tried to explain. To die, he said, remembering the lesson that had come with the beating, that is nothing; all of us do it. Suicide is a victory in a way, because it makes death come to us on our terms. St. Cyr and the others, however—

"St. Cyr's gone," snapped the policeman. "Did you know that? He's gone and so is his bodyguard. Master Finloe from Biochemistry is gone, and his secretary says he left with Jillson and that old blonde. Where?"

Cornut frowned. It was not in keeping with his concept of immortality that they should flee in the face of a plague. Supermen should be heroic, should they not? He tried to explain that, but Rhame pounced on him: "Super-murderers, you mean! Where did they go?"

Cornut said apologetically: "I don't know. But I assure you that they had reasons."

Rhame nodded. His voice was suddenly softer. "Yes, they did. Would you like to know what those reasons were? The savages brought that disease. They came off their island carrying active smallpox, nearly every one of them. The most active cases were brought; the well ones were left on the island. They were given injections—to cure them, they thought, but the surgeon says they were only cosmetic cures; the disease was still contagious. And they were flown to every major city in the world, meeting thousands of people. They were coached," said Rhame, his face working, "in the proper behavior in civilized society. For example, the pipe of peace isn't their custom; they were told it would please us. Does that add up to anything for you?"

Cornut leaned forward, his horrified eyes on Rhame. Add up? It added up; the sum was inescapable. The disease was deliberately spread. The immortals had, in their self-oriented wisdom, determined to move against the short-lived human race, in a way that had nearly destroyed it more than once in ancient days: They had spread a fearsome plague.

Locille screamed.

Cornut realized tardily that she had been drowsing against

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his shoulder, unable to sleep, unable after the sleepless night to stay fully awake. Now she was sitting bolt upright, staring at the tiny glittering manicure scissors in her hand.

"Cornut!" she cried. "I was going to stab you in — in the throat!"

IT was night, and outside the high arch of the bridge was a line of color, the lights of the speedy monotracks and private vehicles making a moving row or dots.

On one of the monotracks, the motorman was half listening to a news broadcast:

"The situation in the midwest is not as yet critical, but a wave of fear has spread through all the major cities of Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska. In Omaha more than sixty persons were killed when three heli-buses bearing emigrants collided in a bizarre midair accident, apparently caused by pilot error in one of the chartered planes. Here in Des Moines all transportation came to a halt for nearly ninety minutes this morning as air-control personnel joined the fleeing throngs, leaving their posts unattended. In a statement released—"

The motorman blinked and concentrated on his controls. He was fifty years old, had held this job and almost this run more than half his life. He rubbed the sensor collar irritably; he had worn it nearly thirty years, but tonight it bothered him.

The collar was like a deadman's switch, designed to monitor temperature and pulse, electronically linked to cut the monotrack's power and apply the brakes in the event of death or serious illness to the motorman. He was quite used to wearing these collars and appreciated their need; but tonight, climbing the approach ramp to the bridge in third speed, his throat began to feel constricted.

Also his head ached. Also his eyes itched and burned. He reached for the radio mike that connected him to the dispatcher's office, and croaked, "Charley, I think I'm going to black out. I—" He fell forward. The sensors around his neck had marked his abnormal pulse and respiration and reacted as he collapsed. The monotrack stopped dead.

But another one drove catastrophically into its tail.

The motorman of the second unit had been feeling queasy for more than an hour and was anxious to get to the end of his run; he had been overriding the automatic slowdown controls all the way across the bridge. As he passed the critical parameters of sensor monitoring, his own collar

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switched off the power in his drive wheels, but by then it was too late; the wheels raced crazily against air. Even the sensor collars had not been designed to cope with two motorman failures in the same second. White sparks flew from bridge to water and died—great white sparks that were destroyed metal. The sound of crashing battered at the campus of the University below. The bridge stopped, its moving lights becoming a row of colored dots with one great hideous flare of color in the middle.

Distant ambulance sirens began to wail.

CORNUT held his weeping wife, his face incredulous, his mind working. Locille trying to kill him? Impossible!

But like the other impossible factors in his own life, it was not inexplicable. He became conscious of faint whispering thoughts in his own mind. He said to Rhame: "They couldn't reach me! They tried to work through her!"

"Why couldn't they reach you?"

Cornut shrugged and patted Locille's shoulder. She sat up, saw the scissors and hurled them away. "Don't worry, I understand," he said to her, and to the policeman: "I don't know why. Sometimes they can't. Like in the refectory kitchen; they could have killed me. I even wanted them to, but they didn't. And once on the island, when I was all beered up. And once—remember, Locille? — on the bridge. Each time I was wide open to them, and on the bridge they almost made it. But each time I was fuddled. I'd been drinking," he said, "or taking sleepy pills, and they should have been able to walk right in and take possession . . ." His voice trailed thoughtfully off.

Rhame said sharply: "What's the matter with Locille?"

The girl blinked and sat up again. "I guess I'm sleepy," she apologized. "Funny . . ."

Cornut was looking at her with great interest, not as a wife but as a specimen. "What's funny?"

"I keep hearing someone talking to me," she said, rubbing her face fretfully. She was exhausted, Cornut saw; she could not stay awake much longer—not even if she thought herself a murderer, not even if he died before her eyes, not even if the world came to an end.

"Talking to you? Saying what?"

"I don't know. Funny. 'Me softspeak you-fella.' Like that."

Rhame said immediately: "Pidgin. You've been with the aboriginals." He dismissed the

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matter and returned to Cornut: "You were on the point of something. You said sometimes they could get at you, sometimes not. Why? What was the reason?"

"Drinking or taking sleepy pills."

It was true! Three times he had been where death should have found him, and each time it had missed.

And each time he had been fuddled! The alcohol or sedation in his brain, the selective chemicals that struck first at the uppermost level of the brain, reducing visual discrimination, slowing responses . . . it had deafened him to the mind voices that willed him to death!

"Smellim olefella bagarimop allfella," Locille said clearly, and smiled. "Sorry. That's what I wanted to say."

Cornut sat frozen for an endless second.

Then he moved. The bottle he had carried with him, Rhame had thriftily brought back to the room. Cornut grabbed it, up-ended it, took a deep swallow and passed it to Locille. "Drink! Don't argue — take a good stiff drink!" He coughed and wiped tears from his eyes. The liquor tasted foul; it would take little to make him drunk again.

But that little might save his life . . . Locille's life . . . it might save the world's!

XV

TAI-I Masatura-san got up from his bed and walked to the strong new fence. The crazy white people had not come up with dinner for them. It was getting very late, he judged. A few weeks ago, on his island, the Southern Cross, wheeling about the sky, was all the clock a man needed. These strange northern constellations were cold and unpleasant. They told him nothing he wanted to know, neither time nor direction.

His broad nostrils wrinkled angrily.

In order to become a tai-i, a captain, he had had to become skilled in the art of reading the stars, among many other arts. Now that art was of no value, rendered useless by the stronger art of the white man. His gift of deepsmell — the reaching out with a part of his mind to detect truth or falsehood that made him a tribal magistrate — had been voided by the old ones, who smelled so strongly and yet could baffle his inner nose.

He should never have trusted the softspeaking white man of great age, he thought, and spat on the ground.

His second in command moaned at the door of the hut.

In the creolized speech which served them better than the

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tribe's pidgin or Masatura-san's painful English, the man whimpered: "I have asked them to come, but they do not seem to hear."

"One hears," said Masatura-san.

"The old ones are softspeaking endlessly," whined the sick man.

"I hear," said Masatura-san, closing his mind. He squatted, looking at the stars and the fence. Outside, the campus was still noisy, voices, vehicles, even so late at night.

He thought very carefully what he wanted to do.

Masatura-san was a tai-i because of strength and learning, but also because of heredity. When the Japanese off the torpedoed destroyer had managed to reach that Pacific island in 1944, they had found a flourishing community. The Japanese strain in Masatura-san's ancestry came on from that generation. Before that, his forebears were already partly exotic, for the twelve Japanese were not the first sailors to wash ashore. Once "Masatura-san" had been "Masterson." English fathers and Melanesian mothers had produced a sturdy race — after the objecting male Melanesians had been killed off. The Japanese repeated the process with the hybrids they found, as the English had done before them, except for a few.

One of those few was the great-grandfather of Tai-i Masatura-san. He had been spared for exactly one reason: He was the chief priest of the community, and had been for nearly a century; the islanders all would have died to save him.

Three hundred years later, his second-generation offspring had inherited some of his talents. One was "deepsmelling" — no sniff of the nostrils, but a different sense entirely. Another was age. Masatura-san himself was nearly a century old. It was the only thing he had managed to conceal from the owners of the strange softspeak voices who had found him on his island, and promised him much if he would help them.

The "deepsmell" of the world beyond the barricade was very bad.

Tai-i Masatura-san thought carefully and made a decision. He moved over to the hut and poked his second in command with his foot. "Speak along him-fella two-time again," he ordered in pidgin. "Me help."

CORNUT left his wife smiling laxly and sound asleep. "I'll be back," he whispered, and with Sergeant Rhame hurried out onto the campus.

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The wind was rising and stars broke through scudding clouds. The campus was busy. Around the Med Center, hundreds of people still waited, not because they had hope of immunization —the fact that the vaccine was ineffective had been announced —but because they had nowhere else to go. Inside the clinic, medics with white faces and red eyes labored endlessly, repeating the same tasks because they knew no others. In the first hour they had discovered that the reference Stacks had been looted of three centuries of epidemiology; they could not hope to replace them in time, but they could not help but try. Half the medics were themselves sick, ambulatory but doomed.

Cornut was worried, not for himself but for Locille. Thinking back to the Field Expedition, he remembered the shots that they had all taken and felt it more than likely that everyone receiving them had been rendered immune to the smallpox. But what of Locille? She had had nothing.

He had already told Rhame about the shots, and Rhame had instantly reported to the police headquarters; they would radio the island, try to locate the medics who had administered the vaccine. Neither of them was hopeful. The immortals would surely have removed all traces of what might halt their attack against the short-lived bulk of humanity.

But that thought had a corollary, too: If the immortals had removed it, the immortals had it now.

The aboriginals were waiting. "You called us?" said Cornut—it was a question; he still could not really believe in it — and Masatura-san nodded and reached for his hand.

Rhame blinked at them dizzily. Cornut had made him also take three large drinks—not because Rhame had shown any signs of being telepathic, only because Cornut was not sure. It seemed like a drunken vision, the math teacher linking hands with the squat brown man, wordless. But it was no vision.

After a moment Cornut released the islander's hand. Masatura-san nodded and, without a word, took the bottle from Cornut, drank deep, and passed it to his second in command, barely conscious on the ground behind him.

"Let's go," said Cornut thickly, his eyes glazed. (It was hard to be just drunk enough!) "We need a popper. Can you get one?"

Rhame reached into his pocket automatically and spoke briefly into his police radio before he asked questions. "What happened?"

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Cornut wavered and caught his arm. "Sorry. It's the immortals. You were right; they imported the smallpox carriers—went to a lot of trouble. But this fellow here, he's a lot older than he looks. He can read minds, too."

The police radio squawked faintly. "They'll meet us over near Med Center," Rhame said, putting it back in his pocket. "Let's go." He was already moving before he asked: "But where are we going?"

Cornut was having difficulty walking. Everything was moving slowly, so slowly; his feet were like sausage-shaped balloons, he was wading through gelatine. He measured his movements carefully, in a drunken, painstaking effort at clarity; he did not dare get really drunk, he did not dare become really sober.

He said: "I know where the immortals are. He told me. Not words—holding my hand, mind to mind; physical contact helps. He didn't know the name of the place, but I can find it in the popper."

Cornut stopped and looked astonished. "God, I *am* drunk. We'll need some help."

Rhame said, stumbling over the words, "I'm drunk, too, but I figured that out for myself. The whole Emergency Squad is meeting us."

THE cleared space near the Med Center was ideal for landing helipoppers, even though it was dotted now with prostrate figures, sick or exhausted. Rhame and Cornut heard the staccato bark and flutter of the helipoppers and stood at the edge of the clear space, waiting. There were twelve police poppers settling toward them. Eleven poised themselves in air, waiting; the twelfth blossomed with searchlights and came on down.

In the harsh landing light, one of the recumbent figures near them pushed himself up on an elbow, mumbling. His eyes were wide even in the blinding light. He stared at Cornut, his lips moving, and he cried faintly: "Carriers!"

Rhame first realized the danger. "Come on!" he said, beginning to trot, lurching, toward the landing popper. Cornut followed, but others were waking feverishly.

"Carriers!" they cried, a few of them and then dozens. It was like the birth of a lynch mob. "Carriers! They did it to us! Get them!" Sick figures pushed themselves to their knees, hands clutching at them. Some men, drooping in a knot, whirled and came toward them. "Carriers!"

Cornut began to run. Carriers? Of course they were not carriers; he knew what it was. It was St.

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Cyr perhaps, or one of the others, unable to break through the barrier of alcohol to reach his own mind, working with the half-waking minds of the feverish or exhausted hundreds on the grass to attack and destroy them. It was quite astonishing, meditated one part of his mind with drunken gravity, that there were so many partial telepaths in this random crowd; but the other part of his mind cried Run, run!

Stones began to fly, and from fifty yards away, across the green, Cornut heard a sound that might have been a shot. But the popper was whirling its blades above them now. They boarded it and it lifted, leaving the sudden mob milling about below.

The popper rose to join the rest of the squad. "That was just in time," breathed Cornut to the pilot. "Thanks. Now head east until—"

The co-pilot was turning toward him, and something in his eyes stopped Cornut. He and Rhame acted together. As the co-pilot was reaching for his gun, the police sergeant brought up his fist. Co-pilot went one way, the gun another. Cornut jumped for the gun, pointed it at the pilot. "This is an emergency popper, right? With medical supplies?"

Rhame understood at once. He leaped for the locker and broke out a half-liter of brandy in a sealed flask. He handed it to the pilot. "Drink!" he ordered. Then: "Get on the radio! Tell every man in the squad to take at least two ounces of brandy!"

It was, thought Cornut fuzzily, a hell of a way to fight a war.

XVI

RHAME was only a sergeant, but the pilot of the lead popper was a deputy inspector. The other helipoppers questioned the order, but they obeyed. The fleet sailed out over the bay, over the city, up toward the mountains.

Under them, the city lay helpless, a giant killing-pen where blind crowds roamed in terror. Cornut could see, even from a thousand feet, the fires of wrecked vehicles, the litter of motionless bodies, the utter confusion that the plague had wrought. There had been by now, the deputy inspector said, more than ten thousand reported deaths in the city, but only a fraction of them were from smallpox. Accident and violence had slain the rest. How many deaths were unreported? Twice as many, a hundred times as many—there was no way of telling.

It was, Cornut knew, what the immortals wanted. They had

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kept their herd of short-lived cattle for a long time; the herd had increased until it threatened to deprive its unseen owners of space, food, everything. Like any herdsmen, the immortals had decided to thin it out. What could be more painless—for them—than a biological thinner? Myxomatosis had given Australia control of the rabbit swarm; smallpox could bring the human one under control.

Cloudily, Cornut was able to read the motives of St. Cyr and the others, striking down those who like himself might learn of their existence, defeating research that might give them away by concealing it. It was a constant defensive action, and he could understand their need to

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remove every threat. He could forgive their attempts on his own life, he could forgive their killing of so much of a world.

But he could not forgive the threat to Locille. For she was exposed. Some would survive the plague in any event—some always did—but Cornut was a mathematician and he did not accept such odds.

All these years, he mused, immortals were directing humanity in directions they chose. No wonder the great strides in medicine, no wonder the constant competition between manufacturers to outdo each other producing luxuries and comforts. What would happen to progress if the immortals were destroyed?

And yet, he thought, begin-

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ning to sober up, wasn't there something in Wolgren about that? No, not Wolgren. Somewhere in statistical theory. Something about random movements.

The Brownian movement of molecules—that had been on Master Carl's mind, he remembered. The Drunkard's walk—the movement from a dead center ever smaller, asymptotically, never stopping.

Straight-line progress was always to an end. If the immortals directed it, it could go only so far as they could conceive, and no further.

They were not the future, he realized with sharp clarity. They instigated—and let humanity do the solving, because they could solve nothing themselves. They were the old generations refusing to make way for the new, and the future was always the new generations, never the old, and —*Cornut!* said a shrill, angry voice in his brain.

Panicky, he grabbed for the flask of medicinal brandy. The liquor supply was getting low. They would have to hurry; they dared not get sober.

SENATOR Dane stirred angrily and crackled an oath with his mind that sent ripples of laughter through the party. *Don't laugh!* he thought. *I've lost them again!*

But was there real reason to worry? Senator Dane never drank, but he had observed the shorties drinking and he knew what drinking could do. They would pile up against a hill; they would crash into each other. Certainly they would never find this place—although Masatura-san's mind had been powerfully clear, and possibly there had been a leak, and—no, St. Cyr himself had selected Masatura-san's tribe for the job of extermination and no one could conceal anything from St. Cyr. And the place was unfindable.

It had been a resort hotel at one time, used for conventions of the sort that are not meant to be public, pre-empted from a gangster who had in turn pre-empted it from its not very legitimate builders. The gangster had been a nuisance and the immortal who killed him had felt rather virtuous as he murdered a murderer.

The hotel no longer had roads leading to it and there was no other habitation within twenty miles. That had been expensive, but, expense was the least important factor in any of their plans. There was room for all of them, seventy-five immortals from every part of the world, children of sixty or sixty-five on up to the oldest, a man who had been born in the reign of Cali-

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gula. (There were few born before the twentieth century, because of the public-health contribution to their longevity, but those few seemed unwilling ever to die at all.)

There were women who, with repeated plastic surgery, had managed to keep themselves in the general appearance, from a distance, of youth. There were visible ancients, like St. Cyr with his cyanosis and his scars, the squat old Roman with his great recurring keloids, the hairless, fat black man who had been born in slavery on the estate of the King's Governor of Virginia. Color made no difference to them, nor race nor age; the factor that counted was power. They were the strongest in the world, as they insured by killing off anyone potentially stronger.

Not one had seen a war or an earthquake or a volcano at close range. Each had, for all of his prolonged life, surrounded himself with walls and with guards. There were drawbacks to their lives, but not such a drawback as dying.

In the hotel, staffed by Sudanese flown in a decade earlier—kept completely out of touch with the world and guarded from even chance contact with a wanderer by a totally unfamiliar tongue—the immortals prepared to sit out the plague. Senator Dane wandered among them, jovial but inclined to worry. He annoyed them. The undertone of worry irritated. They chaffed him about it, in words of fifty languages (they knew them all) or in thoughts, with gesture and tone. But he infected them all.

FEAR is a relative thing. The man who is starving does not fear the early frost that may destroy the crops. He can only worry about what is close at hand. The well-fed man can worry years ahead.

The immortals could worry a full century ahead. They looked far into the future, and every distant pebble in their path was a mountain. Suppose, mumbled the fear behind Dane's jolly mask, that they do find our place here. True, we can destroy them with their minds, as we always have—but that is a nuisance—and some of us may get hurt. This is our best place, but we have others, and staying far away from scenes of violence has always been the best policy for us.

Shut up, thought (or said, or gestured) the others.

He was interfering with their fun. The Roman was demonstrating a delicate balance of a feather on a soap-bubble (he was the strongest of them; it was hard to move physical objects

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with the mind, but with age it became possible).

But the fear said: We have lost them. They might be anywhere. (The bubble collapsed.) The fear said: Even if we flee, they are not stupid; they might search the house and find our own medics. And then—look then! Then they can end the plague, and, with not enough of them dead, billions of people will be hunting down us seventy-five! (The feather floated to the ground. The immortals shouted at Dane peevishly.)

"Go," said St. Cyr in his clock-tick voice, angry enough to speak aloud, "de-stroy the ser-um. Do not spoil our day!"

Unwillingly Dane went. His mumbling worry stopped abruptly, and cheerfully they went back to their enjoyment. It stopped abruptly for Dane too. He was in the downstairs hall, looking for one of the Sudanese, when he heard a sound behind him. But he was fat and he was, in spite of everything, very old. The blow caught him and he fell heavily. He was only vaguely conscious of the hands that rolled him over, the acrid taste of the liquid—was it brandy? But he *never* drank!—they were forcing down his throat.

He did not know, but there were a dozen stumbling figures around him. As he began to recover consciousness, he knew, but then it was too late. It was so *still!* The voices in his mind were not speaking! The alcohol was a barrier; it deafened him, blinded him, marooned him; he had only eyes and mouth and ears, and for one whose life has been illuminated by the rapid flash of the mind itself, that is black silence. He began to sob, hardly noticing that the figures who had attacked him were now moving on toward the main hall, not noticing at all that they carried guns.

XVII

CORNUT passed out completely on the way back and slept soddenly for hours. Rhame let him sleep. There was time enough for everything now, even for sleep. The medics, with the restored tapes for the Stacks, had already begun the task of preparing vaccine; the captured hundred liters of serum was already being rationed to the public. The mobs were quieted—it took only hope to end their terror—and the danger, for most, was past. Not for all. The serum would never reach places in time for some, and there were many already dead. But the dead were only in the millions . . .

Cornut woke up like an explosion.

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His head was pounding; he staggered to his feet, ready to fight. Rhame, full of wake-up pills, reassured him quickly. "It's all right. Look!"

They were back in the city, in a hastily cleared penal wing of one of the hospitals. Along a corridor, room after room, there were old, old men and women, sleeping or staggering.

"Twenty of them," said Rhame proudly, "and every one guaranteed to have one point five per cent of alcohol in the blood or better. We'll keep them that way until we decide what to do next."

"Only twenty?" demanded Cornut, suddenly alarmed. "What about the others?" Rhame smiled like a shark. "I see," said Cornut, visioning that queer contradiction, dead immortals. Better, he told himself, than a dead planet.

He did not linger. Rhame had already phoned the campus and learned that Locille was well but still asleep, but Cornut needed to see her himself.

A police popper took him to the campus in a pelting rainstorm and he ran through the wet grass. The grass was stained and littered; the windows of the Med Center showed where the mob had nearly smashed its way in. He hurried past, past the aboriginal camp, now deserted, past the Administration Building, past the memory of Master Carl and the clinic where Egerd had died. The rain clouds stank of fumes from fires in the city; across the river there still lay thousands of unburied dead.

But the clouds were thin and radiance was beginning to shine through.

In his room, Locille stirred and woke. She smiled.

"I knew you'd be back," she said.

He took her in his arms, but even in that moment he could not forget what Rhame had told him, what they had already learned from the drunken, babbling immortals.

It was not short-lived humans the immortals had killed or driven to death—it was young immortals. The mutant gene was a dominant, and now that it had shown so often, it would soon fill the race. The immortals had not preserved themselves at the expense of a race that should have become extinct. They had only protected their own power against the Cornuts, the Locilles, the countless others with whom they refused to share.

"I knew you'd be back," she whispered again.

"I told you I would," he said. "I'll always be back" . . . and he wondered how to tell her what "always" had suddenly come to mean for them.

—FREDERIK POHL

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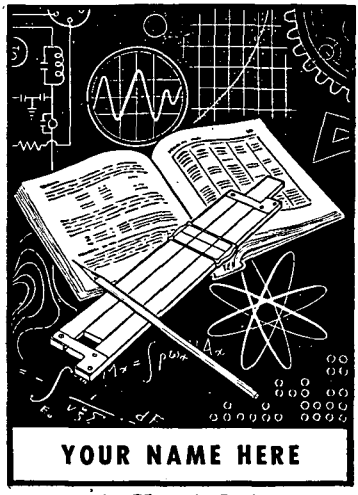

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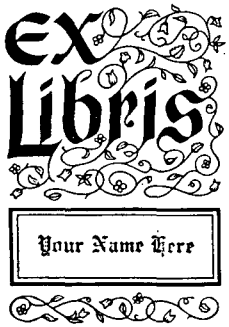

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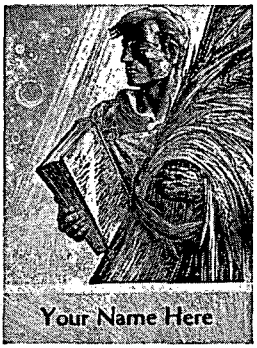

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